CHURCH CLUSTERING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

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This dissertation, written by

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PREFACE

Without the experience of Project Understanding, the fellowship and skills of the local and national staff and the support and consultation of Becky, this dissertation would never have been completed.

iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

In this dissertation I shall examine some of the possibilities of local church clustering as a developing church form for social change ministries. I am convinced that, if the church is to be the "people of God," responding to God's action in our present history, it needs to be involved in social change. That is, the church needs to change and it needs to be a leaven for change in society. For the sad fact is that most local churches are more a part of the problem than part of the solution to important issues where people and the environment are exploited. In order for churches to become part of the solution, new commitments and new forms to embody those commitments need to be developed. One form that is gaining popularity throughout the country is that of local church clustering.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines a "cluster" as "a number of similar things growing together or of things or persons collected or grouped closely together."[1] Local church clustering is the grouping together of a limited number of local churches for common gain. Anywhere from two to twenty churches can form a cluster to cooperate on a wide variety of tasks.

The task that I am primarily interested in is shaping, enabling

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[1] *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1963), p. 158.

1

and creating social change. This phrase, "social change," could have many meanings. It could imply any change in man's or woman's social relationships. However, the social change that I am concerned about is that affecting those social relationships where people and their institutions exploit and oppress others. The primary justification that is given for that exploitation is difference. Groups in society use color, sex, age, education, wealth, politics, religion or culture as a rationale for attempting to de-humanize and exploit others.

A further understanding of what I mean by "social change" can be gained by contrasting it with "social service." "Social service" implies giving aid to the victims of exploitation. Providing emergency food supplies to those who are hungry is one example of a "social service." Even though this is an important task, it does not attempt to deal with the economic system, the age discrimination or the racism that are the primary cause of the need for these services. "Social change" differs from "social service" in that it changes the social, cultural and institutional systems that make social service necessary.[2]

It is important to clarify what this type of social change means for the white middle class church. Most white church members are the beneficiaries of the exploitation of the poor in this country and in the world. The institutions that maintain the suburban economic style of life are filled with racist assumptions and effects. The

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[2]The term "social action" has often been used for what I call intentional "social change." See Dieter T. Hessel, *A Social Action Primer* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 29-52, in which he elaborates on the difference between "social action" and "social service."

individual white church person does not have to self-consciously dis-
criminate against or exploit others. Like the bomber pilot that never
sees the people on the ground, the white church person can get benefits
from exploitation without recognizing the toll in human and natural
resources that he or she is taking. It is not necessary for white
church members to actively exploit others in the United States.
Acceptance of the *status quo* does the same thing.

Because they passively, and sometimes actively, support the
exploitive *status quo* most white church members are more a part of the
problem than part of the solution to de-humanization in our society.
This fact must be recognized in any attempt at social change in white
churches or that change will become another form of paternalism. Many
attempts at social change result in attempts by the affluent and the
white to change the poor and the colored. Thus, "social change," as I
use it, implies that those involved in fostering the change must also
change.

I began to realize the possibilities of local church clustering
for this type of social change when I was a staff person in the first
cluster of Project Understanding. Project Understanding is an effort
to counter the culture and institutions of white racism in white
suburban communities. It is also an effort to develop models for the
training of ministers. It began in 1969 in five locations throughout
Southern California and Arizona. I was one of two staff persons in an
ecumenical cluster of churches in Arcadia, California.

It was there that I got acquainted with the advantages of

clustering for social change ministries. I was most impressed by the personal freedom and issue orientation that the cluster allowed me as a staff member. The cluster also helped to free some clergy and laity from their traditional church roles so that they could begin to change both personal and institutional racism.

The advantages of the cluster approach also became apparent to the Project directors. They decided to recruit clusters instead of individual churches for the second and upcoming third year. The third year, 1973-74, is a national effort in five locations throughout the country.

I have written this dissertation to gain some perspective on my personal experience in Project Understanding I and the experience with clustering in Project Understanding II. The following chapters reflect my concern for three aspects of clustering: the history and development of the movement to clustering, the possibilities for developing clusters for effective social change and the development of a theological context for this form of the church. In the second chapter, I have tried to present an overview of the clustering phenomenon. I have suggested some of its historical roots as well as some categories for understanding the present phenomenon. My concern is to examine the context in which clustering for social change takes place. Then, in the third chapter I have examined Project Understanding as one example of clustering for social change. I have examined the experience and the rationale that lead to the choice of clustering over single church efforts at change as well as the insights about effective clustering gained in Project Understanding. In the fourth chapter, I

suggest some elements of an ecclesiology of clustering. If clustering

is to be a form of the church, then it must be examined in relation to

its theological roots.

CHAPTER II

THE CLUSTER MOVEMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

In Seattle, Washington, unemployment became a serious problem
in 1970-71. This created a need for food among the "new poor," the out-
of-work professionals, as well as for the "old" poor. In response to
this crisis the churches of Seattle established the "Neighbors in Need"
program. However, this was not a highly centralized effort, as one
might expect. There was only minimal area-wide organization. Instead,
local clusters of churches were developed and encouraged to establish
·their own structure and mode of operation. Thirty-four food banks were
established, some in already existing clusters and some in newly
organized clusters.[1] The Seattle clergy and laity felt that neighbor-
hood clusters were the best church form for the purpose of responding
to this need.

In West Covina, California, a small group of clergy from three
churches began their cooperation by discussing the absence of any
ministry to college-age youth in their churches. By combining resources
in the Summer of 1972, they were able to develop an ongoing ecumenical

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[1]Ray Ruppert, "Getting it *All* Together . . . a report on the
effect of an economic crisis on interchurch cooperation in the Puget
Sound area," (religion editor of the *Seattle Times*, Seattle, Washington,
June 1971). (Mimeographed)

6

college group. This success has led to other cooperation. The three

churches have jointly sponsored an Old Testament film series. They are

also planning a joint Easter work team for the youth of the churches.

Some of the clergy and the youth advisors of the three churches are

meeting on a regular basis to develop cluster-wide programming.

The foregoing are two examples of what seems to be a movement

toward clustering in local churches throughout the United States. The

movement had taken on such proportions by 1971 that the Consultation on

Church Union began a major study of the phenomenon to see how it

effected the discussions of Church union. The limited data to date

suggests that clustering is a widespread and growing movement. Clusters

can be found in almost all of the fifty states.[2] Surveys of the United

Presbyterian Church substantiate the importance of this movement. In

1969, they found that over 2,400 United Presbyterian Churches, over

one-third of the total, had been involved in some kind of cluster.[3]

This movement has been growing because the benefits of cluster-

ing have become obvious to a large number of clergy and laity. For

example, clustering could (1) combine church resources for social and

political action; (2) help dying churches survive; (3) give clergy a

new support group and some professional revitalization; (4) provide

possibilities for specialization in ministry; (5) reduce unnecessary

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[2]Theodore Erickson, chairman, "Consultation on Church Union Task Force on Local Church Clusters Report to Plenary," (Denver, No. 16, COCU: 71, September 27, 1971), Appendix I. (Mimeographed)

[3]Edward M. Huenemann, "Clusters: Some Theological Reflections," (New York, United Presbyterian Church), p. 2. (Mimeographed)

duplication of programming; (6) encourage judicatories to develop new structures for ecumenical programming and mission; (7) give a new, community-based identity to fragmented local churches, (8) enhance the movement toward Christian unity; (9) re-excite many who have left the church because of its irrelevance or (10) renew the local church.[4]

Many of the possibilities just mentioned are exciting. Some of them are more than possibilities, because they have been actualized in clusters throughout the country. However, there is at least one other possibility. Clustering could become a structural "game" for some churches. It could provide local churches and denominational judicatories with another excuse to concentrate on internal structural matters and escape the task of creating new people and a new society. In this way, clustering could be a hindrance in social change ministries.

The rest of this chapter will be devoted to getting some perspective on the possibilities of clustering by examining how it has developed. I will first examine the historical roots of the clustering movement to see some of the forces behind its development. Then, I will take a look at the present state of the clustering movement. In the last part of the chapter I will examine some ways of categorizing the phenomenon of clustering.

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[4]"Clusters, Guidelines for the Development of Local Church Clusters," (New York, Division of Evangelism, Board of National Missions, United Presbyterian Church, USA and the Division of Evangelism, Board for Homeland Ministries, United Church of Christ, May 1970) p. 2.

II. THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CHURCH CLUSTERING

Even though church clustering has only become popular in the cities during the 1960's and early 1970's, its historical roots go back to the early 1900's. During this time at least four church movements have contributed to the development of the present local church clustering movement. They are (1) the movement toward rural church cooperation; (2) the Church Federation movement; (3) the Christian Unity movement as symbolized in COCU (Consultation on Church Union), and (4) the Church Renewal movement. Each of these will be briefy discussed to show how they relate to the present clustering movement.

Rural Cooperation

Pastors in rural churches saw the usefulness of local church cooperative structures as early as 1910. Two basic organizational forms for clustering were developed then, the larger parish and the group ministry. Both of these forms are still in use today. The history of this rural cooperative movement is chronicled by Marvin Judy in *The Larger Parish and Group Ministry* and a revised edition entitled *The Cooperative Parish in Non-Metropolitan Areas.*[5] These early cooperative efforts are the beginnings of the clustering movement in the United States.

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[5]Marvin T. Judy, *The Cooperative Parish in Non-Metropolitan Areas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), also Marvin T. Judy, *The Larger Parish and Group Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1959).

At the outset, Harlow S. Mills of Benzonia, Michigan developed
the larger parish. Mills organized a number of rural churches, that
formerly had separate ministers and program, into one parish with a
centralized director and staff. This larger parish included the com-
bined area of the parishes of the separate churches. Thus, the staff
were able to specialize in different aspects of ministry.

The other major cooperative model was the "group ministry." It
differs from the larger parish in that the churches involved do not
lose their identity or pastor to the larger unit. Instead, they
cooperate to maximize the use of the resources of each church. Marvin
Judy quotes the 1956 edition of the Discipline of the Methodist Church
to demonstrate the differences between these two forms.

> The larger parish is usually organized with one minister as
> chairman. He directs the work of a staff of specialized workers.
> The parish is guided by a council made up of representatives
> elected by the cooperating churches. The purpose of the larger
> ministry is to serve effectively the entire constituency of the
> area through the sharing of leadership resources and information...
>
> The group ministry is a voluntary plan of cooperation and associ-
> ation of churches in a natural geographic or political area to
> make better use of ministerial and lay leaders. A council com-
> posed of ministerial and lay representatives from each church is
> the usual form of organization.[6]

In the larger parish most decision-making is done on a parish-wide
basis. Property and budget are often under the care of the parish.
In the group ministry, it is only in these areas of common interest
that there is some centralized decision process. The staff of the
group ministry is largely composed of the ministers of the local

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[6]*Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

congregations involved. Even though they retain their identity as pastors of a single congregation, there are some possibilities for staff specialization in this form as well.

The larger parish and the group ministry are the most important cooperative forms developed in the rural church. The extended ministry, the enlarged charge and the yoked field are all variations on these two forms involving fewer churches and only one pastor. Techniques of church federation and merger were also developed in rural areas to bring churches together for survival. Marvin Judy gives a resumé of all of these forms in his book *The Cooperative Parish in Non-Metropolitan Areas.*[7] They will not be dealt with here. However, they do suggest the early experience of rural churches in developing local cooperative models.

The movement to rural cooperation began at this time, partly because of the idealism of the leaders. For example, Mills based his development of the larger parish on five convictions that were somewhat radical for his day.

> (1) 'The real object of the church is to serve people.' (2) 'The church must serve all the people' within a given geographic area. (3) ' . . . it (the church) must serve all the interests of the people.' (4) ' . . . the village church . . . must be responsible for the country evangelism.' (5) ' . . . if the village church would fulfill its mission, it must be a community church.'[8]

However, the movement to rural cooperation was not done solely for idealistic reasons such as those given by Mills. The rapid

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[7]Judy, *The Cooperative Parish* . . . , pp. 70-86.

[8]Judy, *The Larger Parish* . . . , pp. 60-62.

urbanization of the country had already effected the rural churches by 1910. Both people and money had left the country for the cities. Many small farm churches did not survive. Those that did often found their resources and programming severely limited. These small churches and their denominational officials fostered many of the cooperative efforts to deal with both the survival and the programming problems.

Thus, as early as 1910 rural churches began clustering together for survival or for the enhancement of traditional programming. They experimented with a number of models of cooperation. But, the urban churches did not immediately appropriate these forms. The formal cooperation in the cities moved on a much larger scale.

The Church Federation Movement

By the early 1900's, church cooperation in the cities took the form of the citywide Church Federation movement. Throughout the late 1800's, citywide groups were developed to deal with specific aspects of church programming, such as Christian education, evangelism and youth work. For the most part, these groups worked independently of each other. However, in the early 1900's, a movement developed to centralize these different organizations under the umbrella of a city church federation.[9] Although local church clustering was discussed during this time, it was not implemented. The extensive work of sociologist H. Paul Douglass provides some insight into the formation of these

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[9]H. Paul Douglass, *Protestant Cooperation in American Cities*, (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1930), pp. 41-43.

church federations and their relationship to local church clustering.

The impetus for the city church federation movement came primarily from national church leaders. As they were forming the national cooperative efforts, beginning with the Evangelical Alliance in 1867, they encouraged the development of citywide federations. The first of the city federations was formed in New York City in 1895.[10] Then, as the national organization progressed from the National Federation of Churches, formed in 1905, to the Federal Council of Churches, formed in 1908, a comprehensive campaign was developed to establish local Federations or Councils.

According to Douglass, the national leaders had a twofold concern for practical unity and social change that motivated the initiation of the federations:

> Nothing is more plain than that these men regarded Christian unity, not merely as an end glorious in herself, but more as an effective means to what they had most at heart, namely, the social application of religion . . . . They had been moved by the 'bitter cry' of the poverty and sickness of the city masses, and stirred by the scandalous misgovernment of American cities.[11]

The unity sought by these leaders was a "unity for the sake of power."[12] Their hope was that these federations could be effective instruments of social change.

It would seem that this social concern might have led to the fostering of cooperation at the neighborhood level. Indeed, local church clustering was proposed as early as 1924 by Douglass, himself,

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 47.   [11] *Ibid.*, p. 45.   [12] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

in his *St. Louis Church Survey*. In this work he calls for "localized cooperative adaption":

> No amount of cooperative purpose and machinery functioning
> merely for the city as a whole can bring working cooperation
> in the various neighborhoods into its city sub-divided. A
> central agency of the Federation is not enough. The churches
> of a given neighborhood cluster do not have to do with those
> at the other end of the city. They have very much to do with
> one another. The problem of cooperation must finally be
> solved in terms of these neighborhood groups of churches and
> other institutions.[13]

Douglass saw that clusters of local churches could develop a definite sense of community concern:

> Where the area containing a cluster of churches with compact
> parishes coincides with that served by other common institu-
> tions, and exhibits natural physical or social boundaries
> the religious people who live in it are most likely to have,
> or to be able to develop, definite neighborhood feeling.[14]

However, even with the advantage of Douglass' leadership, local church clustering did not develop in the early life of the Federations. In 1930 Douglass reported the following:

> The conception that groups of neighboring churches representing
> a distinct district or community ought to cooperate in matters
> of immediately local concern is constantly reiterated, sometimes
> provided for on paper, occasionally experimented with; but it is
> nowhere effectively realized. . . .[15]

Today, most clusters still have no formal relation to the Councils. The continued emphasis on cooperation and social concern in some Councils of Churches may have helped to develop a climate for the

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[13]H. Paul Douglass, *The St. Louis Church Survey* (New York: Doran, 1924), pp. 145-146.

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 147.

[15]Douglass, *Protestant Cooperation . . .*, p. 87.

acceptance of clustering in urban areas. However, the greatest influence on clustering has probably come from what the Church Councils have not done. By not developing cooperative models on a neighborhood level, they left a gap that later was filled by the indigenous movement toward clustering.

There are at least two reasons why the movement to clustering did not grow directly out of the citywide church federation movement. One is that city churches in the early twentieth century did not face the same survival questions that faced the rural churches at that time. The suburban exodus was well under way by 1925, and some urban churches faced survival problems. But, most of them had a place to go--to the suburbs with the money and the white Protestant membership. The rural churches did not have that option. It has only been in the 1960's that mainline Protestant congregations have faced dwindling membership and finances with no place to run. It may be that these survival problems are part of what is necessary to force individual local congregations out of their competitive stance toward neighboring churches.

Another factor was the inability of the national leaders to convince the church members at the city and local level of the need for organizing to deal with social concerns. Douglass reports that much of the prophetic voice of the early leaders was lost in the struggle to organize the National Federation of Churches. Many of the activists found the compromising distasteful and left the leadership roles. During the next ten years, there was a radical shift in mood from one of social change to one of organization building. Douglass states that

the "social service" that was included in the National Federation did not have its original prophetic quality. Without this strong national leadership, social service played an even more nebulous and un-prophetic role in the life of the city federations.[16]

This lessening social awareness was accompanied by a rejection of the "social gospel" by many church people and by many theologians as too naive or as too threatening. Without this kind of pre-eminent social concern, there was less emphasis on community involvement in the local churches except for the sake of imperialistic types of evangelism or "Christmas basket" benevolences. Thus, it took a renewal of the "social gospel" in a less naive but still idealistic form to provide the rationale for the development of local clusters. This took place in the church renewal movement.

The Renewal Movement

In the 1950's and 1960's many clergy, laity and theologians began to develop a renewed social consciousness. The primary force behind this new awareness was the Civil Rights movement embodied in Martin Luther King. Many church leaders became aware of the exploitation of minorities in America and the role of the church in that exploitation. They also became aware of the acceleration of technological and cultural change in society. In response to this consciousness theologians proclaimed that, if churches are not in mission to

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[16]*Ibid.*, p. 47.

this changing world, then they are not the Church.

As this social concern has developed so did the awareness that the local church was usually a reactionary preserver of the *status quo* and not in mission to the world. These reformers claimed that, in order for the church to be in mission to the world, it had to be renewed. This renewal included the development of new church forms that would allow the church more effectively to minister to its surrounding community.

In 1962, Gibson Winter in *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* was one of the first in the renewal movement to propose a type of clustering for this new form. In this book, Winter describes what has happened to the churches in the wake of the exodus to the suburbs. He recognized that the social and economic isolation of these suburban churches and their responsibility for the deprivation of the inner city. In order to transcend these geographic and social boundaries, Winter proposed the clustering of local churches into larger parishes. These parishes would be developed by dividing the city into "sectors" that included the poor and the black as well as the affluent and the white. This sector ministry would have a similar structure to that of the rural larger parish with its centralization of decision-making, control of property and the development of specialized staff.[17]

Another work with a similar proposal was that of Stephen Rose, editor of *Renewal* magazine. He wrote *The Grass Roots Church* in 1966 to

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[17]Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 171-173.

elaborate a proposal for "a cooperative ministry of clusters of churches."[18] He proposed neighborhood clustering as was suggested by Douglass. Rose was more concerned with developing new forms to free up resources for renewal and mission in local areas than with contact between socio-economic groups. Again, the form that he proposes is basically that of the larger parish. In this book, he shares his dreams of what local churches could do by totally combining their resources.

These two books have been widely read by churchmen and certainly have had an effect on the movement toward clustering. They develop strong arguments for cooperative ventures. However, most of the recent clustering has not been based solely on larger parish models. It seems that the greatest impact of this part of the renewal movement has not been on the particular models developed, but on the acceptance of the need to renew local church structures through cooperation. The social concern and the cooperative models were available in the 1920's. The realization that basic church structures needed to change in order for local churches to be involved in social change was not. The language of the church renewal movement has thus provided much of the rhetoric for the present clustering movement.

COCU

It is not possible to talk about the movement toward clustering

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[18]Stephen C. Rose, *The Grass Roots Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 9.

in the 1960's without mentioning the Consultation on Church Union.

During their deliberations they have also developed a model for the

local parish that is based on clustering. In fact, it is very close

to the model proposed by Gibson Winter with its emphasis on socio-

economic diversity. It is also a larger parish structure.

COCU has sent its proposal throughout the United States to be

studied and discussed. This discussion has undoubtedly reinforced the

movement toward clustering. It has brought the possibilities before

a large audience. However, the 1971 study of clustering prepared for

COCU showed that only 8% of the respondents used the COCU parish

concept in developing their own cluster.[19] Many clergy and laity see

the great merger proposed by COCU as a step toward the "top down"

imposition of clustering. That did not work in the Church Federation

movement and present clustering has developed largely from the other

direction.

By way of summary, then, the beginnings of clustering emerged

in the rural church which attempted to survive the process of urbaniza-

tion. The "larger parish" and the "group ministry" forms, that are

still in use, were first tried there. However, the city churches did

not see an immediate need to adopt those forms. Instead, they began

local church cooperation on a much wider level. Through the Federation

of Churches, city congregations cooperated to deal with citywide

issues. Even though neighborhood clustering was discussed in the 1920's,

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[19]Erickson, *op. cit.*, Appendix I, Table 1.

it was not implemented.

A combination of the church renewal movement and the threat of dwindling membership and financial resources provided the impetus for the clustering movement of the 1960's. The renewed awareness of the social application of the Gospel helped many church members to see that local church structures had to be renewed if the church's mission were to be accomplished. The uncertainty in many local churches about money and membership has led them to see cooperation as being in their own self-interest. The combination of these two factors has led to the development of clustering as a movement of major proportions.

III. THE SPREAD OF CLUSTERING

The first well publicized attempt at using rural cooperative styles in the urban scene was the East Harlem Protestant Parish, initiated in 1948. The EHPP did not begin as a cluster of churches, but as an attempt to establish a new parish by seminarians and denominational judicatories who saw a need for ministry in Harlem. However, the EHPP did eventually cluster together its storefront churches with other local churches into a larger parish. A number of larger parishes based on a similar model were developed in other cities after this experiment broke the ground.[20] But, the development of larger parishes has not become the major thrust in clustering.

It was not until the early 1960's that clustering began to

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[20]R. Moore, and D. Day, *Urban Church Breakthrough* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 133-145.

develop as a widespread movement. It was then that the "group ministry" style of cooperation began to be implemented with local churches in cities. The local cooperation of churches to deal with a community crisis, to develop a neighborhood power base or to increase programming options has grown since then.

The COCU study of clustering presented at the Denver Plenary in 1971 gives the only "hard data" available on the phenomenon to date. The study has problems in that they used a nebulous definition of clustering. However, it does give some interesting clues as to the nature of present clustering.

Clustering is definitely a widespread and growing phenomenon. There were 376 respondents to the questionnaire mailed out in the COCU study. That accounted for 1012 local churches who were involved in some kind of cluster. The study indicates that the number of clusters organized has increased each year since 1964. Sixty-three per cent of the clusters were organized since 1968.[21] However, these figures report clusters that were known only to the denominational officials contacted by COCU for the study. There are many clusters in Southern California alone that are not on the COCU list. Therefore, this study only represents the "tip of the iceberg" and must be interpreted as such.

Even though the study is limited, it indicates that clustering is not an isolated phenomenon. It is not limited to rural or to inner

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[21]Erickson, *op. cit.*, Appendix I, Table 1.

city areas. Almost 23% of the clusters in the COCU study were in suburban areas. Twenty-seven per cent were in the inner city and 32.5% were in small towns or in the country.[22] There are known clusters in 44 of the 50 States.[23]

The movement also appears to be coming from the "grass roots." Clusters are occasionally stimulated by denominational officials, but almost 72% of the respondents indicated that clusters were initiated by local pastors or lay leaders. The single denominational clusters were most often initiated by judicatory officials, probably as sub-units of denominational structures. However, over 46% of these clusters were initiated locally. Denominational officials took a larger role in establishing rural clusters. Councils of Churches or COCU leaders were only involved in initiating slightly more than 5% of the clusters.[24]

The main source of financial support for clustering seems to be the local churches. About 85% of the clusters were financially supported by the local congregations involved. The district or regional level of church organization was involved in supporting over 37% of the clusters and there was national support for 22%. Only 11% of the clusters got support from secular agencies.[25]

A wide variety of denominations participate in the clusters studied. They include traditionally "conservative" and "liberal" denominations. Jewish, Roman Catholic and Salvation Army congregations

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[22]*Ibid.*

[23]*Ibid.*, Appendix I, Table 4.

[24]*Ibid.*, Appendix I, Table 1.

[25]*Ibid.*

were involved as well. However, the "mainline" Protestant denomina-
tions were the most active in the clusters studied by COCU. United
Methodist, United Presbyterian and United Church of Christ congregations
had the largest representation.[26]

Again, it is important to note that these data are limited.
However, that fact helps to confirm the importance of the movement. If
the number of congregations involved is much larger, then the estimation
of the diversity and strength of the movement can only be enhanced.

IV. SOME CATEGORIES FOR UNDERSTANDING CLUSTERS

The published attempts to think critically about clustering
are few and far between. Many of the ideas presented here have been
gleaned from the Cluster Consortia, a multi-denominational group of
cluster participants and scholars. This group was generated out of
the first consultation on clusters held by the United Presbyterian
Church USA in early 1969 in Phoenix. Later that same year, in Valley
Forge, Pennsylvania, the Cluster Consortia had its first consultation.
Then, in June of 1971, another, more extensive consultation was held
in Seattle. It is from the unpublished reports of these meetings that
many of the following ideas have been taken.

Even though clustering is being discussed, there is still a
lack of clarity as to how it is to be defined. The COCU survey
referred to earlier, defined a cluster as "two or more congregations

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[26]*Ibid.*, Appendix I, Table 3.

engaged in joint activity at some level."[27] This extremely broad definition produced four main categories of respondents: (1) multiple denomination clusters, (2) single denomination clusters, (3) task groups and (4) multi-church parishes under one pastor.[28]

A much more precise definition is that given by David Meekhof in the report of the Phoenix United Presbyterian Church Consultation on Clustering.

> A church cluster is an association of congregations within a limited geographical area committed by official congregational action to shared ministry and mission.[29]

This is a useful definition of a "church" cluster. However, some clusters include community organizations other than churches. It also seems to suggest that geography is the only determinant of the boundaries of a cluster, which is not the case. Thus, there are weaknesses in this definition as well.

Another way to define the phenomenon is to look at the process that takes place in creating a cluster. The pamphlet entitled "Clusters," sponsored by the United Presbyterian Church and the United Church of Christ, does just this. It does not define a cluster but describes clustering.

> Clustering can be described as a *process* which creates new, multi-level relationships, goals and structures among existing churches, persons and community organizations.[30]

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[27]*Ibid.*, p. 1.   [28]*Ibid.*, p. 2.

[29]David Meekhof, "Some Tentative Conclusions on the Formation of Church Clusters" (New York, Board of National Missions, United Presbyterian Church, USA, Feb. 1969), p. 15. (Mimeographed)

[30]"Clusters . . . ," p. 4.

This description expresses the dynamic character of the process of clustering. It also suggests the wide variety of possibilities for clustering. However, it does not point to the geographical or issue related limits within which this process usually takes place. Not all cooperation among churches is considered as being "clustering."

In the next few pages, I shall attempt to clarify further what is involved in the process of clustering and what the boundaries of that process usually are. To do this, I shall examine some suggestions for categorizing the goals and structures of clustering. I shall not examine the possible relationships, except to note that, as in the definition offered at the Phoenix Consultation of 1969 most clusters involve relationships between local churches. However, community organizations, individuals who are not church members, house churches, storefront churches or any other of a number of church-related and secular organizations could be involved in clustering. After I examine some of the possible goals and structures for the process of clustering, then I shall briefly sketch the boundaries within which clustering usually takes place.

Goals of Clustering

Examining the goals of a cluster is a useful way of differentiating among various types of clusters. The definition of a cluster from the Phoenix Consultation states that the goal of a cluster is "shared ministry and mission."[31] The Seattle Consultation went beyond

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[31]Meekhof, *op. cit.*

this to suggest four categories of goals that are presently involved in clustering: (1) "clustering for joint parish program," (2) "clustering for community needs," (3) "clustering for community needs and for church renewal," and (4) "clustering as the emerging church."[32] There is one category which seems to be left out of this scheme. It is "clustering for church renewal only" and this category seems to belong between (1) and (2). These five goals are not mutually exclusive, but, one goal usually dominates the others at a given time in the life of a cluster. Each goal will now be examined in more detail.

Clustering for joint parish program. Another name for this type of cluster is an "efficient" cluster.[33] These clusters are formed to increase the efficiency and quality of the traditional programming of the churches involved. This is often limited to the development of joint youth programming, but it can include the combining of many church functions to insure their survival. Most of the early rural clusters organized around this goal. They seldom had a new focus in mind. They wanted to broaden their evangelistic or educational efforts by expanding on programs that were typically a part of the individual congregation's life.

Denominational judicatories also foster clusters with this as a primary goal. Some denominations are developing clusters primarily

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[32]Norman Green, "Preliminary Report and Notes of the Seattle Cluster Consultation, June 6-9, 1971" (Valley Forge, American Baptist Home Mission Society), p. 15. (Mimeographed)

[33]"Clusters . . . ," p. 4.

as a more efficient way of handling what they normally do. The focus is not on renewal, even though the rhetoric is often there. It is rather upon shoring up the traditional programming in a time when available funds are diminishing.

Clustering for church renewal only. "Church renewal" has become, in recent years, a catch-all phrase for many changes proposed in church life ranging from a renewed evangelical effort to radical social change. However, many churches are taking up the banner of "church renewal" without promoting change in the way the church relates to the community. Included in this category are those clusters that never go beyond making changes within the internal life of their own constituency.

This category also includes those clusters initiated by denominational judicatories in order to decentralize decision-making. These are not merely attempts to improve programming, but real efforts to redistribute power within a region or denomination. In at least one synod of the United Presbyterian Church, clusters and their representatives have been included in synod level decision-making to "broaden the base of participation in the planning process."[34] Still, this new distribution of power does not necessarily affect the churches relationship to the secular communities in which they are located.

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[34]D. Koelling, "The Role of the Presbytery in Cluster Ministries," (New York: Division of Evangelism, Board of National Missions, United Presbyterian Church, USA, report of the consultation held Nov. 13-14, 1969), pp. 2-3. (Mimeographed)

Clustering for community needs. Some churches cluster solely for the purpose of dealing with community problems. This clustering is based on the assumption that more money and volunteers can be found by combining the resources of a number of churches. For example, churches cluster to establish shopping center ministries, youth centers, community organizations and day care facilities. It is not rare for these clusters to become removed from their constituent local churches by incorporating. The ministry they perform often involves church members, but just as often has little impact on the churches themselves. These clusters do not develop organized efforts aimed directly at changing the churches.

Denominational executives have also stimulated the formation of this type of cluster. For example, the Southwest Interparish Ministry (SWIM) was initiated in Chicago in response to growing racial confrontations in the southwest area. The regional Presbyterian staff proposed a cluster to a group of four Presbyterian clergymen and offered to fund it.[35] Here, the regional staff saw the possibilities of clustering for dealing with community needs before it was seen by the local staff.

Clustering for community needs and for church renewal. Clusters in this category combine their concern for the community with a

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[35]L. Rediger and K. Jacobson, "A Report on Southwest Interparish Ministry, Chicago, Illinois" (New York, Division of Evangelism, Board of National Missions, United Presbyterian Church, USA, April 1971). (Mimeographed)

concern for change in the church. As was stated earlier, it has been the combination of these two concerns that has given much of the idealism and rhetoric to clustering. However, implementing this two-fold effort has often been difficult. Clusters can too easily move to the more limited goals previously discussed.

One example of an effort to keep both goals in mind has been Project Understanding. Its effort to deal with white racism has been focused on both white suburban communities and white churches. Renewing the church and the community are seen as interrelated tasks. That is especially true in the area of racism where many studies have suggested that church members are often more prejudiced than the society as a whole.[36] Hence, change in local churches is necessary if those churches are to be a force for change in their community. Clustering is used in Project Understanding to provide the organizational base for this twofold change effort.

Clustering as the emerging church. This category is the most difficult to apply of all the categories proposed in Seattle. It seems that it refers not so much to what is done, but more to a state of consciousness about what one is doing in church clustering. It takes clustering seriously, not just as an organizational tool, but as a form of the Church. This category, then, must necessarily be an extension of the previous one. It would seem that in order to be a form of

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[36]Jeffrey Hadden, *The Gathering Storm in the Churches* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), p. 143.

the Church, a cluster would have to be concerned with both community needs and church renewal. However, if the cluster is to be the Church, it must also be aware of its God given purpose. Chapter IV will deal with this concern in more detail.

Thus, clusters can form for very pragmatic or very idealistic goals or for a combination of the two. However, what determines the success of these goals is how they are concretized in the organizational processes and structures of the cluster.

Processes and Structures of Clustering

Two of the organizational forms of church clustering have already been examined in the discussion of rural clustering: the larger parish and the group ministry. However, clustering as a process can be represented by other categories as well. Two complimentary ways of looking at the structures of cooperation in clustering will be discussed here. One is a "comprehensive design of cluster development." The other is a list of the styles or levels of cooperation that can emerge in clustering. Both were suggested by Theodore Erickson at the Seattle Consultation of the Cluster Consortia in 1971.

The diagram on the following page shows that Erickson differentiates the clustering process into three broad categories: "simple or proto-clustering," "compound clustering" and "complex clustering." These categories are empirically based and describe the developmental process through which many clusters move.[37] Erickson differentiates

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[37]Green, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

COMPREHENSIVE DESIGN OF CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT by Theodore Erickson[38]

	Base	Internal Structure	External Purpose	Relational Process
SIMPLE (proto-clustering)	a) clergy b) grass-roots c) Administrative--superstructure	Little or no $ Informal leadership No constituency Vague intention Role confusion Irregular meetings	Church functions Youth and elderly Specific and needed services	Individual initiative Ideological biases Limited commitment *Continuity* with churches
COMPOUND (clustering)	a) plus b) OR a) plus c)	Formal leadership Formal meetings Multiple roles Statement of purpose Funding Small constituency	Larger social issues More general Community based and/or Church based	Task groups Strategy & Planning Common ideology *Conflict* with churches
COMPLEX (new forms of mission)	a) plus b) plus c)	Board--INC. Multi--funding Multi--staff Own constituency Role differentiation	Range of issues Relating church and community	Multi-purpose organization Coalitions Spin offs Inter-organizational mobility High visibility *Supplement* churches

38[Ibid.]

these types of clustering as to their base of support, internal struc-

ture, external purpose or goals and their relational processes. Under

each category, he lists what is commonly found for the type of cluster-

ing being examined. The chart he developed seems largely self-

explanatory and will not be gone into in detail, except to underline

or disagree.

The first category in Erickson's model is "simple" or "proto-

clustering." Here he points to the beginnings of local cooperation

that are usually casual and relatively unorganized. Ministerial dis-

cussion groups or cooperative task forces are examples of this type of

clustering. These casual contacts can, however, form the experiential

base for the creation of more structured cooperation. For example,

in Arcadia, California, a group of clergy and laity met to discuss

racial issues. They held Black culture fairs for two years before a

Project Understanding cluster was formed to deal with white racism in

that community. The proto-clustering which preceded Project Under-

standing was significant in determining the constituency and the

leadership of the cluster that was developed to implement the project.

Erickson's second category is "compound clustering." In this

category would be examples of formal structuring of cooperative efforts

which still maintain a limited base. This would include small

neighborhood or denominational clusters that use a "group ministry"

model. These churches and other organizations maintain their individual

identity as they cooperate in specific areas. The goals are limited,

and they aim toward specific tasks often relating to larger social

issues. The Arcadia cluster of Project Understanding was a prime
example of this kind of clustering. Its scope was limited to one
issue, white racism. Four churches cooperated in a structure that was
set up for this purpose only. As Erickson suggests, this type of
cluster often has conflict with the constituent churches. This was
true in Arcadia where none of the churches resisted any move to action
on the issue. Compound clusters are structurally close enough to the
local churches so that efforts to deal with controversial issues can
lead to conflict.

"Complex clustering" is often the next move from compound
clustering. Compound clusters sometimes discover that their goals can
be better accomplished by broadening their base of support and incor-
porating. This removes them further from local church control and
opens more possibilities for funding. These can function with a fairly
limited base or they can become quite large, depending on the issue
and the area. Smithhaven Ministries of Lake Grove, New York, is a
complex cluster supported by twenty-three different churches. However,
the largest part of the funding for its shopping center ministry comes
from denominational sources. West San Gabriel Valley Project Under-
standing is an example of a cluster that moved from compound to complex
clustering. It began in one church as Temple City Project Understanding,
but soon added more churches to become a cluster. It now involves
seven churches supporting an incorporated organization focusing on fair
housing.

In examining Erickson's "comprehensive design," it becomes

apparent that it may not be comprehensive. He seems only to be
including group ministry types of clustering, and larger parish models,
which are surely "complex," so not seem to fit. Erickson provides a
remedy for this problem if one considers his list of the five "levels
of interaction" in clustering, found in another part of the notes from
the discussion at Seattle. The levels of interaction are (1) "the
forum style," (2) "functional cooperation," (3) "structural unity,"
(4) "collaboration" and (5) "new association."[39] These levels of
interaction or cooperation are some of the "relational processes" that
can emerge in clustering. They complement Erickson's comprehensive
design so that it can be made more inclusive.

The forum style of cooperation involves the establishment of
some arena for discussion. This would be some place and time where
clergy or laity of the various churches involved could share ideas and
feelings. The discussion could be limited or very broad in scope. It
could also be "just" discussion or it could lead to action. Ministerial
discussion groups could be one example of this forum style of coopera-
tion.

"Functional cooperation" refers to the combining of some of the
functions of the churches or groups involved. Functional groups, such
as Christian education committees or outreach committees, could meet
together with committees from other churches to coordinate their
activities. Even though they would cooperate, these committees will

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[39]*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

still retain their separate identities in this process.

If "structural unity" were the style adopted, then the separate committees would become one committee with a common budget. The structures of the separate groups would be united, reducing the autonomy of each church in that area. Structural unity could proceed until most aspects of congregational life were united. A complex cluster that carried out a style of structural unity could become a larger parish.

The "collaboration" style involves the formation of new functional groups. A cluster could form a new group to deal with issues or goals that were not being adequately dealt with by the groups already in existence. For example, the Arcadia Project Understanding groups that dealt with specific issues related to racism were new functional groups. They involved people who were on a wide variety of other functional groups in their local churches, but gather together under the auspices of the cluster to deal with racism. This style of cooperation can increase pluralism by providing new ways of working together without necessarily doing away with old structures.

In his last category, "new association," Erickson refers to those clusters that choose to break from their constituent organizations to form a new organization. These new organizations may or may not choose to relate to the constituent bodies from which they were formed. However, most "new association" clusters do continue to get some funding from the local churches involved. Complex clusters that form incorporated "ministries" often form a new organization instead of fighting the battles involved in achieving structural unity.

When the foregoing styles of cooperation are combined with Erickson's comprehensive design, the wide variety of structural options in clustering become apparent. Simple clustering is primarily based in the forum style of cooperation, but any of the other styles could have their genesis in the type of structures and levels of interaction that develop there. Complex clustering often leads to new associations, but the structural unity of the larger parish could also emerge. Compound clusters could try many combinations of the styles.

Thus, clustering can take on many organizational forms. It becomes obvious, however, that those limits that distinguish clusters from other forms of cooperation are not only found in their structural possibilities or in their goals but can also be found in their physical and social boundaries.

Boundaries of Clustering

The term "clustering" is usually applied to a process of cooperation that takes place within some limited boundaries. There are a number of factors that determine those boundaries. Geography is usually an important factor as is size. The issue of concern can also play an important role in determining the boundaries of a cluster, and in some clusters, denominational affiliation is the primary limiting factor.

In the 1920's, H. Paul Douglass saw the need for neighborhood based clusters as a complement to citywide cooperation.[40] Most of

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[40]Douglass, *Protestant Cooperation* . . . , p. 87.

the current clustering does seem to be within neighborhood or community boundaries. Groups of churches that are in close proximity often have many common interests and concerns, whether they are in a decaying downtown area or in a new suburban tract. However, complex clustering has often gone beyond neighborhood boundaries into other geographically based spheres of concern.

For example, in Rochester, New York, churches were clustered in "sectors," following and elaborating on Gibson Winter.[41] The "sector ministry" was developed as a "loose confederation of most of the Protestant and Catholic congregations in a particular geographic area within the city limits, roughly corresponding to the city's planning units."[42] These "sector ministries" could be categorized as complex clusters within the boundaries of a city planning unit. However, the sector is actually a "mini-federation." It has run into problems that are similar to those of the larger federations. The boundaries were too large to deal with specific neighborhood problems. So, the sectors have now been broken down into neighborhood clusters of community and religious organizations.

This is a prime example of an organization of local churches and community groups that goes far beyond the neighborhood level. As the geographical base increases, most organizations also increase the

[41]Winter, op. cit., pp. 171-173.

[42]Grace Ann Goodman, "The Northwest Ecumenical Ministry of Rochester, New York" (New York, Institute of Strategic Studies, Board of National Missions, United Presbyterian Church, USA, Nov. 1, 1969), p. 1.

number of participants. These larger cooperative units often do not see themselves as clusters. They become urban or suburban "ministries," "councils of churches," "action coalitions," or some other type of religious based community organization. They may encourage "clusters" to develop as sub-units, as in Rochester, but they seldom call themselves clusters. The term "cluster" usually refers to cooperative efforts of less than twenty churches, and many times less than ten churches.

Although physical geography and size are always important factors in clustering, the issue chosen by the cluster can also have a significant effect on determining the boundaries. For example, in Los Angeles a program called Joint Health Venture is attempting to cluster churches in a concern for health care services. There are some geographical limitations on the cluster. The focus is on an area that has a number of hospitals. However, this area includes a number of different neighborhoods. It is the issue of health care that is of primary importance in determining the boundaries. Even though the boundaries are larger than a neighborhood, there are only a few churches involved in the cluster.

Another increasingly important limit in determining clusters is denominational affiliation. Many denominations and regional judicatories are getting on the clustering "bandwagon" by establishing their own clusters. They usually attempt to cluster together churches that are geographically close. However, this seldom means that these are neighborhood clusters, but a few are. The geographical boundaries are

determined by the spread of that denomination's churches.

It is important to recognize these boundary criteria for clusters. The term "clustering" may be applied to any process of local church cooperation. However, it seems that the term "cluster" is usually applied to a small number of churches cooperating at a neighborhood level on particular issues. This differentiates clusters from Councils of Churches or other large cooperative ventures. Many of the processes are the same, but the boundaries are different.

V. SUMMARY

From its roots in rural parishes, clustering has developed into a multi-faceted movement. Clustering is a "process which creates new, multi-level relationships, goals and structures among existing churches, persons and community organizations."[43] That process does usually take place within limited boundaries. I have elaborated on that description by suggesting a typology of clustering with the help of the Cluster Consortia. That typology is summarized in the following chart.

From this chart it is apparent that clustering is an organizational process with many possibilities. Social change ministries, as I have previously discussed them, do seem to be possible. However, they are definitely not inevitable. Clustering could easily lead to an extension of regular programming and nothing more. The fact that local church survival fears are one impetus behind clustering

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[43]"Clusters . . . ," p. 4.

CLUSTER POSSIBILITIES

Groups Involved

    local churches
    other church related groups
    community organizations
    individuals

Organizational Styles

    forum
    functional cooperation
    collaboration
    structural unity
    new association

Goals

    joint parish program
    church renewal only
    community needs
    community needs and church renewal
    to become the merging church

Boundaries

    geographical
    issue related
    denominational

Organizational Forms

    simple or proto-clustering
    compound clustering
    complex clustering

strengthens that possibility.

Thus, in order to demonstrate some of the possibilities of clustering for social change ministries, the next chapter will be devoted to the experience of Project Understanding. In terms of the typology just listed, the groups involved in Project Understanding have primarily been local churches. The goals of the project have included both community needs and church renewal. Project Understanding has developed a number of "compound" clusters, although one cluster did develop a "complex" organizational form. The most often used organizational style was "collaboration." The boundaries of the clusters were determined both by geographical and issue-related concerns. Since the goal has been to deal with white racism in predominantly white

communities, the geographical "white ghettos" of suburbia were the primary target. Project Understanding has largely become an attempt at church clustering for social change at the neighborhood or community level.

CHAPTER III

PROJECT UNDERSTANDING:

AN EXAMPLE OF CLUSTERING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

I have two goals in this chapter. One is to examine the history
of Project Understanding I and II and to show how and why clustering
became the primary organizational form for this social change effort.
The second goal is to examine the processes and structures used in
Project Understanding for effective clustering.

I shall begin by clarifying the purpose of Project Understanding,
and by giving a description of the formation of the program. Then, I
shall examine the history of Project Understanding I to focus on some
of the advantages of clustering over single congregation models for
this type of social change. The history of Project Understanding II
will then be briefly given to show how clustering was used. Finally,
I shall examine the experience of the clusters in Project Understanding
for some clues to effective clustering for social change and discuss
in some detail initiating, structuring, and staffing a cluster for
social change.

I. THE MOVE TO CLUSTERING

Formation and Purpose of Project Understanding

Project Understanding started as the "brainchild" of Dr. Joseph
Hough of the School of Theology at Claremont. He had a concern for an

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effective Christian response to racism and a belief that the local

church could be included in this response. In late 1968, he and other

faculty members submitted a proposal to the Irwin-Sweeney-Miller

Foundation for a grant to develop Project Understanding. The purposes

of the project were stated in the first year's evaluation report.

> A. To facilitate change in the attitudes of members within
> local churches.
> B. To facilitate change in the institutional practices
> and policies of the local white Protestant churches.
> C. To throw some light on methods of training for
> social change that might be broadly applicable to laity
> and clergy in the local churches as well as to seminary
> education for ministry.
> D. To experiment cooperatively with the seminary, local
> churches and special church organizations in efforts at
> developing models for countering white racism.[1]

Thus, the focus of the program is on both community needs and

church renewal. The church renewal emphasis is given priority partly

because of the realization that racism is firmly entrenced in the local

churches. In fact, a number of studies have suggested that, by and

large, church attenders are more prejudiced and more opposed to civil

rights than others in society.[2]

However, to deal effectively with racism, church members cannot

focus solely on their own institutions and attitudes. Racism can be

defined as any attitude, action or institutional structure which

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[1] Joseph Hough and Dan Rhoades, "Evaluation Report: Project Understanding" (Claremont, California, School of Theology, July 1970), pp. 2-3.

[2] Jeffrey Hadden, *The Gathering Storm in the Churches* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), p. 143; Gordon Allport, "The Religious Context of Prejudice," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* V (1966), 447.

subordinates or forciby assimilates a person or group because of race or color. Racism is not just prejudiced attitudes. It is prejudice that is combined with the power to enforce it. The powers that enforce racism in its most oppressive forms are our economic, political, educational, legal and health institutions. Thus, to deal with racism is to deal with the community institutions that victimize people of color. In this way, the focus of Project Understanding is twofold. It begins with the church, its people and structures, and attempts to build a base for dealing with racism in the community as a whole.

Project Understanding has been funded three times. The first year of the program, 1969-70, involved ten seminarians in five locations throughout Southern California and Arizona. One of these locations was a cluster of churches in Arcadia, California. The second year of the program, 1970-71, involved seminarians in five other locations, four of which were clusters. The third year of the program, 1973-74, is in progress at the writing of this dissertation. The project has been expanded to include six areas of the country: Southern California, San Francisco Bay Area, Atlanta, Chicago, South Bend and Indianapolis. Clusters of churches have been recruited at each of these locations for the third year of this program.

The Advantages of Clustering

During the first year of Project Understanding all but one of the local projects were based in single congregations. However, the experience of this first year led the directors to recruit ecumenical

clusters for the second and third years. The rationale behind this decision indicates why clusters may be a more effective structure for social change and church renewal than the individual congregation.

The Project Understanding II Evaluation Report lists some of the advantages of clustering over individual church participation.

1. Mutual support between the congregations.
2. Cooperative spin-off which resulted in development of new ecumenical possibilities.
3. Greater freedom for the Project's staff operating with an ecumenical steering committee.
4. Greater community involvement through the connections available in the various churches.
5. Development of greater 'joint mission consciousness' among the churches in their efforts to deal with white racism.
6. Greater coordination and effectiveness in social action efforts on the part of community churches.[3]

Most of these advantages became apparent in the first year of the program, when the experience of the cluster was compared to that of the individual congregations.

For example, number five, maintaining a mission consciousness, and number three, the lack of staff freedom, were major problems in most of the single congregations. The Van Nuys, Pasadena and Phoenix projects all had difficulty developing support and enthusiasm for the mission task. The staff at these locations, as well as the staff at the Orange, California project faced even more difficulty in dealing with what they sensed was a lack of freedom for their work.

In Van Nuys, California, the project was located in a medium-

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[3]Joseph Hough and Dan Rhoades, "Project Understanding: Report and Evaluation" (Claremont, California, School of Theology, August 1971), p. 4. (Mimeographed)

sized congregation of approximately 600 members. The pastor was liberal and approaching retirement. The congregation, however, was fairly conservative and many of the members were uncomfortable with the pastor's style. Sensing this split in the congregation, the Project staff decided to deal with racism in the context of other "church renewal" efforts. They believed that there was only minimal support for dealing with racism openly in the congregation. So, they attempted to deal with racism by strengthening the total programming of the church.

To do this, they took on the role of assistant ministers. They preached, did calling and worked with ongoing groups. However, through this work they tried to bring about changes that would lead to dealing with racism. They initiated a reorganization of the Sunday morning schedule to allow for adult classes on racism and other topics. They established adult forums for discussion of major issues and they did racial awareness training with the nursery school leaders. They also worked with the youth on racism as well as other issues.[4]

However, they soon found that many of their efforts as assistant ministers diverted them from their task and did not lead to a "mission consciousness." In their attempts to work with the total church organization, they found that the problems of finance, membership and senior pastor-lay relationships consumed much of their time. Their

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[4]James Nicholie and Theodore Lesnett, "Project Understanding: Van Nuys Team Final Report" (Claremont, California, School of Theology, June 1970), pp. 2-3. (Mimeographed)

"hidden agenda of racism was continually being usurped by the demands of others related to the general theme of church renewal."[5] The internal struggles of this congregation subsumed their effort to deal effectively with racism. The problem was compounded by the perceived norm of social politeness and non-confrontation that made it impossible to deal effectively with the real conflict that existed over racial as well as other issues.[6] Thus, there was no real sense of mission consciousness about white racism except for that of the pastor and a very few of the laity.

The Project Understanding I staff in Phoenix, Arizona, and in Pasadena, California, also had difficulty developing a strong sense of mission consciousness around the issue of racism. However, their situations were quite different from that in Van Nuys. In both of these communities, the Project was centered in a large (over 3,000 member), older-suburban congregation. These two churches were not only large, but they were also extremely active. The pastors and the leadership of the churches were already heavily committed to the tasks of the organization. In both places, the Project staff and the mission consciousness were often lost in the shuffle.

In both Phoenix and Pasadena, the staff assumed the role of anti-racism consultants to some of the already existing church organizations. They worked with church boards, classes, social action committees, day care centers and youth programs. Like the Van Nuys

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[5]*Ibid.*, p. 13. *Ibid.*

staff, they did contribute to a new awareness of white racism and they also infused some new life into some segments of the organization. However, again like the Van Nuys staff, they found that "the nature of the traditional church provided so many distractions that it was hard to keep our change-goals before us at all times. . . ."[7] The Pasadena staff were able to develop enough interest and understanding in one committee to ensure some continuity to the effort.[8] The Phoenix staff had less success, for there was little lay or clergy support for developing a continuous attempt to deal with racism.[9] However, the staff in both locations found that they were often swimming in a mass of meetings without any real sense that a mission consciousness was developing.

A lack of staff freedom was also a problem in these two locations. However, the problem was not a lack of options from which to choose. The problem was the lack of a power base from which to exercise those options. Even though the Project staff were viewed as having some skills, t.hey were often seen as "ministers in training." This diminished their status in these congregations that already had a large staff. This combined with an absence or real support for their efforts, gave them great difficulty in organizing a base from which to

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[7] Jonathan Meury and Michael McKee, "Project Understanding: Pasadena Evaluation" (Claremont, California, School of Theology, 1970), p. 13. (Mimeographed)

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[9] Alexander Campbell and David Chapman, "Final Report: Phoenix Project Understanding" (Claremont, California, School of Theology, 1970), p. 12. (Mimeographed)

operate.

The issue of staff freedom was also important in the Orange, California, project, but in a different way. This church is comparable in size to the Van Nuys church with about 750 members and two full-time pastors. In contrast to Van Nuys, however, the Orange Project staff were able to develop a sense of mission consciousness in this church. They organized a task force on racism that kept this issue at the top of their priority list. This also gave them a power base within the congregation. The limits to their freedom were imposed largely by the senior pastor. As young men still in seminary, the senior pastor saw them as "boys." When they asserted their own ability and began to relate to the laity of the church, the senior pastor wanted assurance that these "boys" would not cause conflict in the congregation that would make his job more difficult. Thus, most of their conflict was between the staff and the senior pastor as he tried to oversee their efforts. This obviously made the task of the staff more difficult for they were working in "his" church.[10]

Neither of these problems was as serious in the one cluster of Project Understanding I as they were in the single congregations. The Arcadia, California, cluster was composed of four churches from four denominations: United Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran and United Church of Christ. It was located in an all white suburban community with a

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[10]Scott MacAdam and Rex Wignall, "Project Understanding: Orange, California" (Claremont, California, School of Theology, 1970), p. 16. (Mimeographed)

population of 50,000. In contrast to the single church locations, the Arcadia cluster demonstrated a sense of mission consciousness and provided a context of real freedom for the project staff.

In Arcadia, mission consciousness was enhanced by the process of clustering. The fact that four churches in this one community were cooperating to deal with racism increased the sense that this was an important program. The clustering provided a tangible, structural difference from business as usual. This difference was most strongly felt in the joint activities of the Project. The clergy and the laity found new support and new challenges in the cooperative effort. The fact that all of the activities of the cluster were related to efforts to deal with racism further increased the awareness of joint mission. Questions of church renewal, cluster organizational maintenance or denominational differences were all dealt with in the context of dealing with the mission goal.

This sense that the Project transcended the boundaries, roles and structures of the local church also freed the staff to have a different role than those in the single churches. Unlike the staff in the Orange project, the staff of the cluster were not limited to any one pastor's congregation. The pastors of the congregations in the cluster did not see the program as being as great a threat as they might have had the project been limited to "their" church. Unlike the staff in Pasadena and Phoenix, the cluster staff had a power base from which we could exercise our freedom. Being staff to a cluster, gave us a much different status than being an assistant staff person in one

church. We were not as easily cast into the role of "boy youth minister." This position also gave us some of the freedom of outside consultants to the local churches of the cluster. We were connected to each local church, but we were not tied to any one church for our support or our accountability. We were "structurally free"[11] in a way not experienced by the staff of the single churches. This advantage of clustering will be examined in more detail in the discussion on "Staffing a Cluster for Social Change."

Along with these two advantages, the Arcadia cluster also provided the other advantages suggested for clustering. The mutual support between the Arcadia congregations, already discussed in relation to the joint mission consciousness of the cluster, provided the setting in which other possibilities for cooperation in mission could be seen. For example, one church had the facilities to do the printing for all four of the churches. They saw that cooperating here could save money and increase the quality of what was being done. Another advantageous aspect of the cooperative effort was that the members of the four churches could provide more connections to the various institutions of the community. These connections led to possibilities for more effective social action. For example, one cluster sub-committee attempted to develop a job placement effort for minorities, using the four churches and their members as resources. The four churches were expected to provide more direct access to employers than one church

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[11] See Hadden, pp. 185-235.

would have.

All of these benefits were important parts of the decision for clustering. However, there were also other factors that were less directly related to clustering that enhanced this decision.

Factors Other Than Clustering

It would be extremely naive to suggest that clustering solved the problems encountered by attempts at social change in Project Understanding I. The final criterion for success is neither "mission consciousness" nor "staff freedom," but how much change takes place. During the first year of the program there were no marked differences in attitude or institutional change between the cluster and the single churches. All locations showed a decrease in prejudice on an opinion survey that was administered at the beginning and the end of the first year. There was also some institutional change in all the locations. The cluster did get approval from all four church boards for the previously mentioned minority job effort. This type of institutional change directly relating to racism was not accomplished in the other churches, but, there was real change in the allocation of church budgets and in internal church structures in all of the locations.[12]

Thus, the differences in achievement between the locations in the first year were not great. However, there were at least four factors that affected all of the locations and lessened the

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[12]Hough and Rhoades, "Evaluation Report," pp. 16-17.

possibilities for change. Time and the perception of time, the focus

on developing models, the mind set and skills of the seminarians and

the difficulty of the issue all militated against significant change.

These same factors also strengthened the decision to go to clustering.

Time and the perception of time were important factors in this

program. Nine months in the field is little enough time to organize

for change around racism. But, added to this was the perception that

this was a "one year program." This "one time" consciousness often

precluded serious thinking about continuity for the change effort. It

often became a "cop-out" for both the interns and the church people,

who assumed that the program would be "over" at the end of the year.[13]

Another obstacle to action was the concept that the program

was only to develop models for change. For some, developing models

did not include testing them out. These "word games" became a conveni-

ent rationale for those who were afraid of action.

The mind set and the skills of the seminarians were also

important factors in the project. We participated in extensive train-

ing programs to prepare us for the Project, and there was also an

effort to match the Project staff to the locations where they might be

most effective. Yet, in some cases, the individual personality of the

seminarians and the particular character of the specific churches did

not jell in a way that led to change.[14]

However, the major reason for the lack of change was the

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[13]*Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24.   [14]*Ibid.*, p. 24.

reluctance of the churches and their members to deal with the issue.
White racism is deeply embedded in the structures and psyche of white
America. Many church people are unwilling to admit that it is a prob-
lem. Even fewer are willing to risk doing anything about it.

In order to deal with these problems, some changes were made in
Project Understanding II. The churches for the second year were
recruited to join a three-year program that would be initiated by
Project Understanding funding. That dispelled some of the difficulties
of a "one-year" program. Clusters were also assured that the program
was to test models for change rather than just to develop them.[15] Thus,
action was clearly specified as a goal. However, the limits of the
funding, the personality of the seminarians, the peculiarities of the
churches, and the difficulty of the issue could not be changed.

Given this reality, clustering seemed an even more logical
choice for the second year. The first cluster experience had shown
that more staff time could be spent directly on racism because of the
increased "mission consciousness" of the cluster. It also seemed that
the negative aspects of the personality of the staff and the peculiari-
ties of the churches could be lessened by clustering. No single church
or style of operation would have to dominate the program. Also, the
structural freedom gave more possibilities for the staff to maximize
their strengths. It also seemed clear, that the support and resources
gained through the cooperation of a number of churches increased the

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[15]*Ibid.*, pp. 27, 29.

possibility of dealing with an issue as difficult as racism.

Thus, in Project Understanding II, four clusters of churches and one community organization were recruited. Three of these clusters were able to utilize the experience of Project Understanding I and develop active anti-racism organizations that went beyond the first year of Project Understanding II. Two of these organizations are still going as of the writing of this dissertation. In the next section I will examine briefly the history of the development of each of these clusters.

II. CLUSTERING IN PROJECT UNDERSTANDING II

Since clusters were the focus for the second year, the process of recruitment was more difficult than that in Project Understanding I. A number of potential locations proceeded with cluster development until, at the last minute, the cluster disbanded, leaving only one or two churches still expressing interest. Still, by the beginning of the program, five locations had been recruited: San Diego, Temple City, Pasadena, Sun Valley-North Hollywood and the San Fernando Valley Interfaith Council. Each of these locations developed their own specific goals, style of operation and organizational forms to carry out the project.

San Diego

The San Diego United Project Understanding began in an ecumenical cluster of four churches in the "Heartland" section of the

San Diego metropolitan area. This suburban complex of communities

borders on the eastern edge of the city of San Diego. Due to the

housing patterns developed in the city, these suburbs had been experi-

encing an increase in their minority group populations accompanied by

an increase in community tension and conflict.

The San Diego Project did not begin by focusing on this conflict,

but first developed and trained a cluster steering committee. However,

this committee was soon confronted by two community issues which helped

it to organize into an effective force for change. In one case a

policeman made a well-publicized racist remark at a local shoplifting

seminar. The committee called attention to the racism by using the

media. Through this effort, some of the committee members were

appointed to a city Human Relations Council. In the second case, a

violent confrontation occurred between students from a predominantly

white high school and students from a predominantly black school after

a football game. The press blamed the incident on the black students.

The committee gathered the facts and demonstrated that it was not one-

sided. Because of this event and the fact that there were teachers on

the committee, they were able to gain entry to the public school

system for the staff to do anti-racism training. Since then, they

have placed their primary effort in attitude awareness training in both

churches and schools.[16]

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[16]Calvin Jackson and William Johnson, "United Project Under-
standing Staff Evaluation: San Diego" (La Mesa, California, United
Project Understanding, 1971), pp. 1-15. (Mimeographed)

After the initial year, United Project Understanding expanded to five churches and continued its training efforts. The staff has also consulted with the local church boards on organizational matters as well as issues more directly related to racism. The staff is now considering the development of two more clusters to deal with racism. Other churches in the San Diego area have seen the program and plan to develop one of their own. The staff is also considering the possibility of working with a local community organization that also deals with racism. In all of their efforts, the staff remains committed to clustering as a base for dealing with racism and renewal in the churches.

Temple City

Unlike the San Diego Project, the Temple City Project began in a single church. Although, it did seem likely from the beginning that a cluster would develop, since the pastor of that church was both committed to the issue and the proto-clustering that was already taking place. Soon after the project staff arrived for full-time work, a cluster of four churches was formed.

The first efforts of the staff were to develop the cluster steering committee into a trained team. During this process, the committee chose to devote its efforts to the issue of fair housing. Temple City is an all white suburban community that borders on growing Mexican-American and Black populations. The fair housing issue had not been dealt with effectively in Temple City, so the committee developed an

organization to do just that. They initiated an official citywide "Fair Housing Day," checked discrimination in house and apartment rentals, and worked with realtors and the schools. They have tried to develop a new awareness in the community of the value of fostering a pluralistic community.

During this first year, the Project staff not only worked toward pluralism in the community, but also worked for the same end in at least one of the churches of the cluster. An extensive "goals project" was developed for future planning in that church. The effect of the program was to develop a greater understanding in the church of the reality of conflict and of the need for diversity in church structures. The cluster also impacted other local churches by developing study and support groups that provided both leadership and sources of funding for the cluster.

However, the community was the primary concern of this group, and they recognized that the achievement of fair housing was a long-term goal. So they, like San Diego, developed an ongoing organization. During the second year of the cluster, the Temple City Project incorporated and became the West San Gabriel Valley Project Understanding. Now there are six highly involved churches and at least four other churches which participate minimally, including some of the churches from the Arcadia cluster of Project Understanding I. They have continued to employ a staff person and have received financial backing from regional church sources as well as from the local churches. Their goal is to develop a complex cluster to effect housing patterns

throughout the San Gabriel Valley.[17]

Pasadena

Project Understanding II was located in Pasadena, California, as was the first year of the project. However, the church that participated in the first year did not continue in the program. A six-church cluster was formed under the auspices of the Ecumenical Council of the Pasadena Area Churches. Thus, this cluster was a part of a larger ecumenical organization in one of the first cities to carry out a successful court ordered busing program. Both of these factors led to the decision to include this cluster.

However, this cluster was recruited hurriedly near the end of the recruitment period. This affected this cluster from the beginning. Much to the surprise of the staff, the cluster committee decided early not to become an action group itself, but to focus on developing programs in the individual churches. The organizing and awareness building efforts in the local churches met with only limited success. A number of educational and training events were held, but only two of the six churches developed ongoing groups. One of these groups did become an effective "Commission on Racial Understanding" in its congregation. It has continued to work in Pasadena on issues related to racism and the efforts of the United Farm Workers. The cluster also

[17]John Forney and Vic Smith, "Temple City Project Understanding: Annual Report" (Temple City, California, West San Gabriel Valley Project Understanding, 1971), pp. 1-19. (Mimeographed)

developed a new department of the Ecumenical Council to deal with racism which then fostered a second year of the program.[18]

During the second year, two new churches were added to the cluster. To carry out the program, one of the staff members was re-hired to work part-time with the program. Even though there was real growth and change in some individuals in Pasadena, this project did not develop enough support to go beyond the second year.

Sun Valley-North Hollywood

In the Sun Valley-North Hollywood area of the San Fernando Valley, Project Understanding II recruited an already existing cluster of five churches. It had only been in operation since early 1970 and had developed out of the working relationships of the clergy of the churches and from their cooperation in an ecumenical lenten service. Three divisions had been developed in the cluster before Project Understanding was added as the fourth: (1) worship, (2) youth and (3) Cares (a thrift shop and food bank for low income families).[19]

Even though there had been strong clergy participation, there was a conspicuous absence of true lay participation and a good deal of vocal opposition in the churches that made this cluster shaky at best.

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[18]Thomas Albright and Haines Moffat, "Project Understanding Pasadena: Final Report" (Claremont, California, School of Theology, 1971), pp. 1-10. (Mimeographed)

[19]Tom Schmitt and Loren McBain, "Final Evaluation: Project Understanding and the Inter-Church Cluster of Sun Valley-North Hollywood, California" (Claremont, California, School of Theology, May 15, 1971), p. 2. (Mimeographed)

The addition of Project Understanding under hurried recruitment conditions increased the problems. For example, the Executive Committee of the cluster expected the project staff to be "youth specialists." At first, the staff all too easily fit into this role. They decided to focus their change efforts on building the credibility of the cluster before moving into dealing with racism. They soon were in demand for preaching, song leading and youth work. As in Van Nuys of Project Understanding I, this subsumed the effort to deal with racism.

When the staff realized what was happening, they decided to recruit and train a task force on racism and provide them with training to develop action. However, they also found this task difficult, for they were not working with middle class liberals or moderates as in the other projects, but with blue collar conservatives. They were largely unable to develop effective models to deal with racism in this setting, although, some progress was made with a small group of people. Enough interest was generated to hire one of the staff members to work through the summer, but, Project Understanding ended when the summer did.[20]

Valley Interfaith Council

The fifth location for Project Understanding II was the San Fernando Valley Interfaith Council (VIC).

> The San Fernando Valley Interfaith Council is a non-profit religious community organization of clergymen and laymen who have joined together because of their concern about the major social issues of our time. The Council's primary goal is to

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[20]*Ibid.*, pp. 1-19.

establish, at a grass roots level, a vehicle for communication, cooperative training and action to spearhead a combined religious/secular approach to community problem solving.[21]

VIC draws its members from over fifty congregations. One Project Understanding staff person was assigned full-time to this organization. One staff person was shared with the Sun Valley-North Hollywood cluster.

A hurried recruitment process was also a problem for this location. No real goal clarity was reached between the Project staff, the directors, the Council and its chairperson until midway in the program. The chairperson of VIC had written a statement proposing that a major task of the new staff would be the development of ecumenical, neighborhood clusters within the boundaries of VIC. However, he neglected to share this with the Council or the Project directors. This lack of clarity led to a variety of goals being developed by the Project staff. One staff person did develop a new cluster. However, this was an off-shoot of his original goal of developing living room dialogue groups on racism throughout the San Fernando Valley. The cluster that was formed did not deal with racism. It examined the COCU parish design and developed some joint youth programming. The staff also got involved in a variety of community issues from organizing a task force on justice to earthquake relief.

One staff member did organize a Presbytery-wide anti-racism program for the United Presbyterian Church. This program was funded

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[21]Tom Schmitt and Austin Watson, "Project Understanding: Final Evaluation" (Claremont, California, School of Theology, 1971), p. 1. (Mimeographed)

for the year following Project Understanding II and provided continuity for the anti-racism effort in the San Fernando Valley. However, it did not continue with a clustering approach.

Summary

It can be seen from these brief accounts of Project Understanding II that some change was achieved. The combination of the learnings from Project Understanding I and the more effective use of clustering developed some genuine successes, especially in San Diego and Temple City. Both the churches and the community were impacted by the clusters in these two locations. The change effort also met some serious problems. However, both the success and the failures provide useful information for those considering facilitating social change through clustering. In the next section, these experiences will be used to give some clues for successful church clustering for social change.

III. CLUES FOR EFFECTIVE CLUSTERING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Now that clusters have proliferated across the country, there have been several attempts to suggest guidelines for their development. One of the first efforts was the pamphlet "Clusters" distributed by the United Presbyterian Church and the United Church of Christ.[22] The

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[22]"Clusters, Guidelines for the Development of Local Church Clusters," (New York, Division of Evangelism, Board of National Missions, United Presbyterian Church, USA, and the Division of Evangelism, Board for Homeland Ministries, United Church of Christ, May 1970).

most recent effort is that of Marvin Judy in *The Parish Development Process*.[23] Relying heavily on his previous work on cooperation in rural areas, Judy suggests a number of ways to develop local clusters in both rural and urban locations. However, neither of these works deal at any length with the specific problems of developing local church clusters that plan to be about social change ministries.

It is at this point that the experience of Project Understanding is most useful. In the attempt to organize suburban churches around the issue of racism, Project Understanding has developed some clues for effective clustering. Since the Project is still only three years old, these clues apply primarily to the initial development of clusters. However, this does not limit their importance or applicability to already existing clusters that are reevaluating their efforts at social change. The experience of Project Understanding in initiating, structuring and staffing a cluster for social change could be helpful to a wide variety of clusters considering intentional social change ministries.

Initiating a Cluster for Social Change

As was suggested in the histories of the Project Understanding II clusters, the process by which a cluster begins is vitally important for its effectiveness. The "halo effect" is a reality. First impressions and early decisions do affect later efforts toward change in

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[23]Marvin Judy, *The Parish Development Process* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973).

clusters. In Project Understanding II, the clusters that developed

the most effective social change actions were those that avoided some

major pitfalls at the beginning, while problems in the initiation of

the program were major afflictions for two of the clusters in Project

Understanding II and significantly affected the Arcadia cluster in

Project Understanding I.

As was indicated in Chapter I, most clusters develop from

proto-clustering or the informal discussions of clergy and laity about

the possibilities of cooperation. Then, the cluster is usually

formalized through the organization of a cluster committee or council

that receives some legitimation from the churches involved. "Initia-

tion," as it is used here, refers to the step from informal discussion

to formal legitimation.

In Project Understanding, the impetus for the initiation of

the clusters came primarily from the Project itself. In the Arcadia

Project, the clergy asked to take on the program as a cluster. After

the first year, the Project directors solicited clusters. They did

not organize the clusters themselves but they asked the local churches

that wanted to participate to develop a cluster. The fact that most

of the Project clusters were stimulated by an outside force rather

than being primarily self-generating may set them off from the majority

of clusters. However, there are more similarities than differences.

For example, there was some proto-clustering in the Project

Understanding locations as there is in self-generating clusters. In

Arcadia, a group of clergy and laity had met for two years to deal

with race-related issues before Project Understanding provided the impetus for the creation of a cluster. This proto-clustering was important in the formation and the development of the cluster, since many of those who had been involved in the proto-clustering served on the cluster committee. This meant that prior to the formation of the cluster some relationships had already been established. These did have an effect on the life of the cluster and the movement from organization to action.

In the following pages, two other concerns related to the initiation of a cluster will be discussed: developing goal clarity about change and the role of the clergy. Both of these concerns were important in the initiation of the Project Understanding clusters.

Goal clarity about change. Even though past experience in cooperation is important, the primary concern for those initiating a cluster for social change must be clarity about the goals of the cluster. For what purpose is the cluster being formed? Is clustering the best way to achieve those goals? How specifically can the goals be spelled out? How widely accepted are these goals? Getting clarity on the answers to these questions is crucial, especially if the goal is to bring about social change. In Project Understanding it was seen that a cluster will be more likely to move to action if there is a strong sense of goal clarity about change from the beginning. This may seem obvious, but many clusters fail in the effort for social change at this point.

There are a wide variety of pitfalls that keep clusters from

achieving goal clarity about social change. When they fall into these traps, the effort for change is often impeded or lost. The pitfalls uncovered in Project Understanding are disguising the goal, choosing too general a goal, choosing too specific a goal, research as the goal, and clustering as the goal.

1. *Disguising the goal.* In Project Understanding there was the tendency, on the part of some clergy and staff, to disguise the goals of the project. This was seen in the discussions of the Sun Valley-North Hollywood cluster and the Van Nuys congregation. In both cases, the staff tried to focus on church renewal in order to facilitate a hidden agenda of social change around the issue of racism. In those cases where the goals were not clearly stated, they were subverted. It was difficult enough to bring about change in clusters where the goals were clearly stated.

One advantage of the cluster is its possible sense of joint mission consciousness. If the goals are disguised so much from the beginning that they are unrecognizable, then that advantage is lost. This attempt to avoid conflict often subverts the very purpose for clustering and insures that social change ministries will be more difficult in those churches than it already is.

2. *Too general a goal.* Another way to avoid conflict over controversial goals is to choose very broad goals that everybody can accept. This is also a sure way to avoid moving to social change. A cluster of churches in Aberdeen, South Dakota found this to be true.

A group evaluating their work found that their goal of clustering for the "mission of the church" led them into becoming a "rent-a-minister" organization. The primary task of the cluster staff person was to fill in for vacationing ministers.[24]

The Project Understanding directors attempted to avoid that problem by stating clearly that the goal was to facilitate change in white racist attitudes and institutions. In those clusters where the goal was not disguised, it was specific enough to mobilize those resources and allies that were in the local churches. It was also general enough to interest some who were not sure what it meant.

3. *Too specific a goal.* Of course, if very specific change goals are widely accepted, this further increases the movement to action. For example, if the cluster is established to develop a multi-racial pre-school, the goals and objectives are clear. However, one difficulty with so specific an initial goal is that broader social change questions can easily be forgotten. What problem is the goal trying to solve? Does this goal really deal with the problem or only with its symptoms?

Another potential problem caused by choosing too specific a goal too quickly is specified in a study of conflict in Project Understanding churches by John Davis. He found that making premature

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[24]Theodore Erickson, Chairman, Joseph Hale, Harold Huff, Paul Mellish, Daniel Parker, "Aberdeen Area Ministry, Aberdeen, South Dakota, Triennial Evaluation, November 18-24, 1969" (New York, Division of Evangelism, Board for Homeland Ministries, United Church of Christ, 1969), pp. 9-12, 23-24. (Mimeographed)

decisions about goals and objectives often leads to conflict. This is especially true if these objectives prove to be unrealistic. In analyzing the early life of the San Diego Project, he stated, "Had more time been allotted for the formation of group identity as well as a thorough analysis of the institutional racism in the community, more attainable goals might have been selected."[25]

4. *Research as the goal.* However, John Davis' statement also points to another possible trap in moving to goal clarity about change—choosing research as the goal. Many clusters form to do research about issues in their church and in their community. Then they try to develop social change efforts from the results of that research. Although research is a very important tool, it does not necessarily lead to social change. In fact, it can also be a way of avoiding change.

In the Arcadia cluster of Project Understanding I, the staff assumed that the stated goal of "developing models to combat racism" did include action to bring about change. However, the members of one of the churches in the cluster assumed that "models" could be developed without being tested. For them, only research was implied by the project goals. The staff played directly into those assumptions by suggesting that research groups be formed as a beginning strategy, before any major decisions were made. An organizational structure was then developed, that did a lot of research but very little decision

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[25]John Davis, "The Management of Conflict in the Local Church as it Encounters Racism" (unpublished dissertation, School of Theology at Claremont, June 1971), p. 78.

making or acting.

Research can be an important basis for an effort at social change. It can also be publicized and used to bring about change. However, choosing research as the end or goal of a cluster, without any commitment to do something with that research, is another way to avoid social change.

5. *Clustering as the goal.* Often clusters escape this initial question of goal clarity about change by setting the formation of the cluster as the primary goal. They assume that once they have established the patterns of cooperation then social change ministries will necessarily follow. This was seen in the history of the Sun Valley-North Hollywood cluster. It was also seen by those evaluating the Aberdeen, South Dakota, cluster. The participants of that cluster had assumed that "ecumenicity leads to mission activity."[26] However, they found that the complexities of the organizing process continually got in the way of moving to action.

This is not to say that it is impossible to move to action after a cluster organization is built. However, form does tend to follow function. If organization building is the end, then those structures that most effectively lead to social change will probably not be developed. In fact, the organization can provide a convenient avoidance of real change. If a social change issue is taken as the goal from the beginning, then the structures that most effectively led

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[26]Erickson, *et al.*, "Aberdeen Area Ministry," p. 28.

to that goal can be built.

Thus, achieving goal clarity about change can be difficult for those initiating a cluster. There are a number of pitfalls that can provide convenient excuses for not moving to change. To avoid those traps, the experience of Project Understanding and that of other clusters suggests that one should begin with an issue or complex of issues related to social change. This issue needs to be specific enough so that it can generate commitment and even some controversy. It needs to be general enough so that important questions about the issue chosen will not be avoided. In any case, it must not be assumed that research or the process of clustering will automatically lead to social change ministries. It must be decided intentionally that change is the goal. If some goal clarity about change cannot be achieved, then some further proto-clustering is probably in order.

The Role of the Clergy. There is often a strong sense of goal clarity among the clergy of a cluster, since it is usually out of the discussions of the clergy that the cluster begins. However, if the clergy do not share the clarity and their power in deciding about the goals of the cluster, roadblocks are established to effective social change.

For example, this problem was pointed out in the historical sketch of the Sun Valley-North Hollywood cluster. The clergy played the dominant role in establishing and maintaining that cluster.[27]

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[27]Schmitt and McBain, p. 2.

They did not fully involve the laity in the decision-making, even though a lay cluster executive committee was established. This became clear when their clarity about the goals of Project Understanding was compared to the total misperception of the program by the lay committee. The laity were expecting youth ministers. Of course, the recruitment process for Project Understanding could have been improved. But, the role of the clergy in initiating the program was the primary problem.

Clergy often assume that others are clear about the goals of a cluster when they are. The Project experience would suggest that that assumption must be challenged, for in the Sun Valley-North Hollywood cluster, lack of sufficient clarity led to serious problems.

Structuring a Cluster for Social Change

The organizational form that a cluster develops can either impede or advance the movement toward change. As was stated in the last section, goal clarity about change is an important aspect of developing an effective structure. Each cluster must also develop the forms that are most appropriate to its goals, its churches and its community situation. The Project Understanding experience gives some clues to the most effective structures for social change ministries through clustering.

As was previously stated, most of the Project Understanding clusters were compound clusters of four to six churches. The style of cooperation that was most often used was "collaboration." New functional groups were formed at the cluster level. These were the cluster

steering committee and the various task forces. The Project could have taken on the style of "functional cooperation." It could have facilitated the cooperation of already existing social concerns committees, because many of the members of the cluster steering committees had been involved in their local social concerns committee. However, there were also many people in the Project who were not previously involved in such groups.

Social concerns committees in local churches often find themselves relegated to a constricted existence. They are often isolated from the areas of education and worship. They are often composed of "professional liberals," who talk much more than they act. Therefore, in developing its clusters, Project Understanding asked for a commitment from the total congregation through the appropriate process. This encouraged some open and concerned church members, who would not have joined the social concerns committee, to become involved in the cluster. It also encouraged a definition of social change that was central to all aspects of church life. Thus, "collaboration" provided a broader base of cooperation than "functional cooperation" would have.

The Temple City cluster began with a style of "collaboration" but it soon took on a style of "new association." As it has moved toward complex clustering, it has developed its own identity as an organization separate from the constituent churches. This style of cooperation seems to be leading this organization away from being a cluster of churches into being a church-based community organization. This process will be examined further in the next few pages.

The primary decision-making structure that carried out the style of cooperation in all of the project clusters was some kind of steering committee. Each cluster was asked to develop a committee to be responsible for the development of the organization and the program. Task forces were developed in all but one cluster to divide the committee's work and to broaden the base of participation.

Cluster Steering Committee. In all but one of the Project Understanding clusters, a cluster steering committee made the important decisions about the program. In the Sun Valley-North Hollywood cluster, the project was one division of an already existing cluster. Thus, it was not the cluster executive committee, but the Project Understanding task force that carried out the program. In this case, it was the executive committee that determined the decision-making relationship of the cluster to the local churches. In all of the other cases, it was the cluster steering committee that both carried out the program and established its own decision-making style.

There are three basic styles of decision-making relationships between the cluster and its constituent local churches:

   a. Centralized. All major cluster decisions are taken to the local church decision-making bodies for approval;

   b. Representative. The cluster is free to make decisions as long as they are made by qualified representatives of the local churches;

   c. Autonomous. The cluster is free to make decisions without the approval or representation of the local church decision-making bodies.

All three of these relationships were tried in Project Understanding I

and II. The experience of Project Understanding and that of other clusters gives some clues as to which styles are most helpful for social change ministries.

a. *Centralized.* The Arcadia cluster of Project Understanding I began with a representative steering committee. The three lay members from each church were chosen by the clergy and confirmed by the appropriate body in their church. However, early in the life of the cluster, the steering committee took on a centralized style of decision-making.

The Arcadia steering committee decided that it could not take action in the name of the cluster unless it was first approved by each of the local church's administrative boards. This decision came about after one of the congregations claimed that research and not action was the goal of the program. They believed that any action would be redefining the original contract between that church and the cluster, and, therefore, must go before each of the church boards. The focus of the steering committee then became that of generating ideas to present to the boards.

The steering committee did have some success with this style. It developed a proposal that was approved by the boards. This previously discussed proposal was to use the members of the various churches as an employment resource bank for minority job seekers. However, the proposal was not implemented. That was partly because those who proposed it lost interest in it. After they got the approval from the church boards, they did not follow through. It was also because the

staff and the cluster committee had so fragmented their time that the
leadership resources were not brought to bear on this one goal.

However, the most important reason that this proposal failed
is apparent in the original decision of the committee to relinquish
any important decision-making power. This was an indication of a lack
of commitment to action. The steering committee was afraid of making
and being responsible for controversial decisions. Therefore, the
power was passed on to the local churches. Even when a decision was
made, it wasn't implemented. This seems to be a pattern with clusters
that use a centralized structure.[28]

The development of the Capitol Hill cluster in Albany, New York
is another example of the problems of the centralized decision-making
structure. In the development of the cluster a "Joint Planning Com-
mission" was established which had only the power of recommendation.
It developed task forces to research the churches and the community.
However, when the task forces reported to the commission, it "did not
know what to do with these reports other than to approve them and send
them to each congregation's own governing board for its approval.
Nobody was charged with implementing the recommendations. . . ."[29]
In its early years, the cluster had great difficulty in getting to

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[28]Curtis E. Jensen and Larry E. Peterson, "Project Understanding
in Arcadia: Staff Evaluation" (Claremont, California, School of The-
ology, June 1970), p. 6. (Mimeographed)

[29]Grace Ann Goodman, "The Capitol Hill Churches of Albany, New
York: Steps toward a Cluster, 1967-69" (New York, Institute of
Strategic Studies, Board of National Missions, United Presbyterian
Church, Oct. 15, 1969), p. 22. (Mimeographed)

action. Whenever a proposal for action was made, the group that proposed it was told that "it was not the proper group to act."[30] The cluster reorganized a number of times, developing new committees with new names. However, the decision-making relationship did not change and there was little action.[31]

The story is similar to that of the Arcadia cluster. This form of decision-making leads to real confusion as to who implements whatever is proposed. The choice of this decision-making pattern also seems to be a sign that the cluster steering committee or the church boards are afraid to make or to implement controversial decisions. The pamphlet "Clustering: Guidelines for Strategy Groups" agrees with this finding. Its author states that the centralized or "United Nations" form of cluster organization usually leads to "efficient programming."[32] That is the extension of regular programming with no significant change. Social change, as I use it here, requires that those who are involved in change also change. Giving the power of the cluster to the local church boards helps the cluster committee to avoid this change and to avoid making important decisions.

b. *Representative.* Three of the Project Understanding clusters chose a representative decision-making relationship to the local churches. However, each of these developed in different directions.

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[30]*Ibid.,* p. 33.

[31]*Ibid.,* pp. 19-33.

[32]"Clusters . . . ," p. 8.

The Pasadena cluster moved toward a centralized style. The San Diego cluster moved toward an autonomous style. The Sun Valley-North Holly-wood cluster had difficulty moving anywhere. The first two clusters will be examined further. The experience of the third cluster adds little to the discussion and will not be examined here.

The decision-making story of the Pasadena cluster steering committee could be told in the section on the use of task forces. For, it is primarily a story of the poor use of task forces. However, one reason that the task forces were not used well is related to the decision-making style of the cluster committee.

As was stated in the historical sketch, the Pasadena cluster of Project Understanding II was sponsored by the Ecumenical Council of the Pasadena Area Churches. The cluster steering committee was a representative body composed of clergy and laity of the six churches. One of the committee's first decisions was that the goals of the program should be set at the "individual church level."[33] So, the responsibility for making the decisions about the implementation of the program was given to the members of the steering committee from each church who were encouraged to develop separate task forces in their churches. The role of the committee was to watch, to encourage, and to recommend. It did not see itself as the group that would do the acting. However, only two task forces were developed in the churches. Only one of these had some impact on its local church. The cluster

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[33]Albright and Moffat, p. 1.

steering committee responded by removing itself further from the cluster. It became the Commission on Racism of the Ecumenical Council.[34]

As in Arcadia, the Pasadena cluster steering committee took on only the power of recommendation. It did not abandon its role as a representative body. It simply gave the responsibility for cluster decisions to its task forces in the local churches. In effect, it centralized the decision-making in the local churches. However, it did not use the regular decision-making apparatus. This effectively eliminated the cluster as a viable power base for social change. The rejection of the possibilities of clustering is shown again in the steering committee's move to elevate itself to the position of a Commission in the Ecumenical council. In this way, it became an umbrella organization encouraging individual church projects rather than an attempt to use clustering.

Why did this happen? One factor is pointed to in the first year report of that project. "Individual churches were considered more important in terms of programming, interest and investment than was the larger cluster group."[35] On face value, this is a simple statement of priorities. However, if a cluster is to develop as an effective organization in its own right, it must be a priority of those developing it. The early emphasis on setting goals in the individual churches was an avoidance of setting goals for the cluster. It spread the resources for change so thinly that it was difficult to organize

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[34]*Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.   [35]*Ibid.*, p. 2.

the task forces. There is no direct evidence to suggest that the representative decision-making relationship was an important factor in this decision. However, the move to centralize decision-making in the local churches is some evidence of the fact that the representatives were fearful of making decisions that might be seen as controversial in the local churches.

This can be seen more clearly in comparing the use of the representative style in Pasadena to the use of the same style in San Diego. United Project Understanding used the representative style effectively by enhancing its autonomy. As in most other locations, the representatives were appointed by the clergy and approved, if necessary, by the appropriate board. They were recruited on the basis of "interest, church involvement and willingness to make Project Understanding a primary commitment."[36] The representatives did not use their constituency as an excuse for not acting, as in Arcadia. In fact, they were willing to take actions that "involved direct conflict with both the church and the community."[37] Unlike the Pasadena committee, they used the power of the cluster to respond to community crises and to get the boards of the local churches to participate in anti-racism training.

The cluster committee established a great deal of autonomy from the local church boards, while retaining its representative style.

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[36]Jackson and Johnson, p. 2.

[37]*Ibid.*, p. 4.

Even though the local churches have funded 50% of the program after the end of Project Understanding II, they have not used their funding to control the cluster. The representatives have taken the freedom to design the program and the local churches have not resisted.

The San Diego experience points to two obvious, but difficult conditions that make a representative style work for social change ministries. One is the presence of clergy and laity who are committed to the task and not afraid of making decisions or action. The other is local church boards that are free enough to allow some autonomy to the cluster.

c. *Autonomous.* The Temple City Project developed a fully autonomous decision-making structure. This project began in a single church and then developed into a cluster. It was initiated by a task force of the church and "task forces at Temple City _____ have always had a large degree of autonomy."[38] But, the real basis for the autonomy was the initial funding of the program. The task force went to individuals, rather than to the church board, to raise the $1,800 needed for that church's contribution. They immediately located twelve persons who would pledge $100 each.

This initial financial autonomy led to the development of an autonomous steering committee. The project has expanded to a cluster effort and has sought funding from the budgets of the churches involved as well as from individuals. However, the local church boards have no

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[38]Forney and Smith, p. 10.

decision-making power over the cluster. They can only endorse or withhold their endorsement. They have given this endorsement and the right to solicit funds for each of the three years since the initiation of the program.

The staff reported that this autonomy has given the cluster useful freedom in a number of areas. One has been the cluster's relationship to the church boards. They have been able to present major proposals to the board without fear that the rejection of a proposal might endanger the cluster. With this freedom, they have met with success when they have approached the boards. They found that a board has more freedom if it is only endorsing an action than it would have if it were deciding on the fate of the action.[39]

The decision-making autonomy also gave the committee members the freedom and the responsibility to deal with themselves and with racism. They did not have to report back to the individual churches before acting. They could not, therefore, use the power of the church constituency as an excuse for avoiding decisions.

There was also a great deal of freedom in the development of the committee. Those members who could not accept the goals chosen by the cluster were free to leave. They were not bound to the cluster because they were representatives. This does not mean that there were purges. The Temple City committee struggled with various aspects of racism until a consensus decision was reached to focus on fair housing.

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[39]*Ibid.*

Rather than feeling obligated to stay with what, for them, was not a major concern, two members left the committee. This was neither a simple nor an easy decision, but it strengthened the move to action.

Another advantage of the autonomous decision-making relationship was structural flexibility. As the fair housing action began to develop, it was decided that a broader base of participation was needed. As other churches were recruited, the steering committee was changed from a tight-knit group into an open forum where basic policy decisions were made by whomever attended.[40] It would be more difficult for a representative body to make such a decision.

One potential problem with the autonomous style is the tendency to avoid impacting the local church. As was previously stated, when a compound cluster becomes a complex cluster, it often develops an autonomous style. When these complex clusters develop a broad base, they tend to lose much of their direct impact on the local churches. It no longer becomes necessary to be intentionally effecting change in the local church. The Temple City cluster, since it has become the West San Gabriel Valley Project Understanding, has begun to make this move. Its strong connections to one church and the development of local support groups has maintained its impact on some of the local churches, but this is decreasing. This is not to suggest that broad-based clustering for community needs is not a significant church form, or that the reasons for the development of this type of organization

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[40]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

are not clear. However, if impacting the local church is one goal of the social change effort, then an autonomous organization must keep this goal clearly in mind.

In summation, the effectiveness of a decision-making relationship is determined by the interaction between the people and the structure. Without good leadership any structure will falter. However, the structure can limit the possibilities of the leadership. This was seen most clearly in the centralized decision-making relationship. The Arcadia cluster leadership was able to get a proposal for action approved by the boards of the local churches. However, the structure seemed to add to the difficulty in deciding how to implement the proposal. The Albany cluster experience reinforces the apparent need for centralized structures to clearly define who is to decide on and implement what. But, even if the structure is clear, it seems that the choice of a centralized form is an indication that the leadership wants to avoid action.

The experience of the clusters that opted for a representative style substantiates this. The Pasadena cluster, in its move toward centralizing the power in the local churches, seemed to be avoiding using the cluster, while the San Diego cluster, in maximizing the autonomy of the representative style, tried to make full use of the cluster. It was also more effective in developing an ongoing organization to deal with racism. It seems that the representative style can be used for change or to escape change.

Those who struggle to develop an autonomous style seem to be

most interested in moving to action, especially community action. This style puts the responsibility for action directly on those involved. However, it often leads a cluster away from impacting its local church base.

Thus, the Project Understanding experience suggests that either a representative or an autonomous style of decision-making can be used for effective clustering. The centralized style seems to have too many built-in problems to be a useful decision-making process if intentional change around social issues is the goal. In fact, any move toward centralization appears to be an attempt to avoid change.

Task Forces. In most of the Project Understanding clusters, the development of a working cluster committee soon led to the establishment of task forces. The cluster committees saw the need to subdivide their work so that more could be accomplished. Two types of divisions were developed: (1) inter-church task forces and (2) intra-church task forces.

The inter-church task forces were primarily oriented to specific subdivisions of racism chosen by the committee. In Arcadia, the task forces were developed to research the issues of housing, schools, violence and employment. The San Diego project has task forces on education, housing, employment and on institutional racism in the churches. The last mentioned group is an inter-church task force to deal with racism in the individual churches.[41]

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[41] Jackson and Johnson, p. 7.

Intra-church task forces were developed in two locations: Pasadena and Temple City. In the Pasadena cluster, this was the only task force model used in the first year. As was reported earlier, the power to carry out the program of the cluster was given to the groups to be developed in each of the local churches. This effort did not meet with much success. In Temple City, the cluster developed both types of task forces. The intra-church groups were organized after an action goal was chosen to develop support for the work of the cluster. These groups were educated in the goals of the cluster, and they were encouraged to spread that knowledge and support throughout their congregation. This was a successful strategy for these support groups generated new leadership and funding for the cluster. They provided an opportunity for those who did not want to make a major time commitment to the cluster to participate on a limited basis.[42]

Both types of task forces could be useful in clustering for social change. However, task forces can also create problems for a cluster. The Project Understanding experience suggests that timing is an important consideration in their development. If the timing is not right, task forces can diffuse the commitment and energy of a cluster past the point of no return. This was seen in the Pasadena cluster and it is apparent in the different ways that task forces were used in the Arcadia and the Temple City clusters.

The Arcadia cluster developed its task forces very early in

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[42]Forney and Smith, pp. 12, 15-16.

the life of the cluster. The cluster steering committee had made no
commitment to action before the task forces were established. The
purpose of these task forces was to research specific issues related
to racism and to suggest action to the steering committee. The steering
committee members took primary leadership roles in the task forces.
Other members for the task forces were recruited from the churches in
the cluster. This strategy might have worked if the leadership had
both commitment and skills in dealing with racism. As it turned out,
this spread the resources for change so thinly that the "critical
mass" necessary for action was never gathered.

In Temple City, the action task forces were developed after
the steering committee had made a decision for action on the issue of
fair housing. The steering committee had subdivided to do research on
a variety of areas before deciding on one issue. However, no effort
was made to broaden the base of participation at that point. It was
only after a decision was made to act on the fair housing issue that
the steering committee developed task forces for the implementation
of that decision. With this process the task forces were successful.

Upon examining these two examples, it seems clear that the
question of timing is directly related to the resources available for
change. Spreading the commitment and the resources for change too
broadly cuts the nerve of action.

Staffing a Cluster for Social Change

The staffing of a cluster for social change ministries is

another area where Project Understanding has gained useful experience.
People in clusters are unsure whether or not to hire cluster staff
other than the ministers of the churches. The Project Understanding
clusters did not have to struggle with this decision because two full-
time staff were included in the funding. However, those clusters that
went beyond the first year did have to make that decision. None of the
clusters had enough money to rehire both staff full time. The three
clusters that continued did hire at least one of the original staff
persons part-time.

Through the experience of the first two years of Project Under-
standing, it became apparent that skilled cluster staff were important,
if not necessary, for a cluster of white churches to move to action
on racism. It would seem that a staff person would be equally useful
for a cluster attempting to deal with any social change issue. The
advantages of a staff person and the skills that are important can be
seen in the role of the staff in moving to social change and in the
effect of "structural freedom" on the staff's relationship to the clergy
and laity and on the staff's relationship to the individual local
churches.

Role of the staff in moving to action. The primary criterion
for evaluating a staff person is whether or not he or she helps the
cluster to achieve its goals. In clustering for social change, the
goal is action that facilitates change in persons and institutions
involved in oppression. The Project Understanding staff took on a
number of roles in helping the clusters achieve this difficult goal.

The staff began their work with the local steering committees. As was pointed out earlier, in the most successful clusters, the steering committee autonomously dealt with the issues and moved to action. In both the Temple City and the San Diego clusters the staff went through a similar sequence of roles to enable this process. They took a strong organizer-trainer role at the beginning of the project and then increased their role as process facilitator and administrator as the steering committee developed its own sense of identity.[43] The progression of these roles give some idea of the variety of skills that are necessary in moving to action on an issue such as white racism.

The staff began with consciousness-raising and training around the issue of racism. Most of the committee members, even those with experience in race and poverty issues, had not dealt with the reality that white racism perpetuated by white-dominated institutions was the primary problem in race-related issues. This realization was a "conversion experience" for a number of committee members. It created a new perspective on racism that affected the goals of the program. It was also a deeply religious experience for many, who saw their faith in a new context. This type of consciousness-raising is important if a group wants to get beyond dealing with the symptoms in any issue of oppression. The staff took a leadership role in initiating the training and also used outside consultants in this process.

This training enhanced and was enhanced by the process of team

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[43]*Ibid.*, pp. 6, 17. See also Jackson and Johnson, p. 3.

building. The cluster staff attempted to build an esprit and a sense of group identity that helped the committee to accomplish its task. Building mutual trust was an important part of this process. The structural freedom of the staff increased the possibility of building this trust. This role will be discussed further in the next section.

As the steering committee developed its identity and common understandings of the problem of racism, the staff facilitated the development of goals for action. At this point the committee asserted more independence from the staff and took a stronger role in leadership. The staff then increased their role as process facilitators and administrators. They tried to facilitate the action decided on by the group by helping the group to develop good process, by suggesting training interventions at the appropriate time and by providing administrative continuity to the change effort.

The specific action of each cluster was developed as a combination of the interests of the committee, the skills of the staff and the situational context of the cluster. Thus, the Temple City and the San Diego clusters developed different styles of action after moving through initially similar processes. This also led to somewhat different roles for the staff.

In Temple City, the staff became the organizers and administrators of a church-based community organization to deal with fair housing. Providing the leadership and the continuity for building and maintaining the organization became their primary task. Anti-racism training became a secondary, but important, part of their relating to

the local churches and the community.

In San Diego, consciousness-raising became the primary function of the staff. The cluster committee was able to utilize community crises to develop training opportunities for the staff in the public schools. The committee has also become involved in a community Human Relations Council. However, it has not attempted to build a broadly-based organization for confronting a particular issue. Thus, training and consulting with the churches and the public schools have been the primary roles of the staff. Organizational maintenance has served that goal.

The mistakes of the staff at another location also points to an important aspect of the staff's role. In the Arcadia cluster of Project Understanding I, the staff had difficulty because we were often unsure of our role. We tried to be process facilitators when the steering committee wanted and needed leadership and training. This was partly due to a lack of conceptual clarity about white racism. We had been trained in organizational development and had been exposed to the effects of racism. However, we had little clarity as to the nature of white racism. Some of the staff of the second year of Project Understanding were able to benefit from our mistakes. With the help of an early exposure to the "New White Consciousness" model of Robert Terry and Douglas Fitch,[44] they were able to develop more conceptual clarity about their task.

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[44]Robert Terry, *For Whites Only* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).

However, conceptual clarity does not insure that the staff will understand the needs of the people for whom he or she works. In order to enable people to be about social change, the staff person must be sensitive to "where they are." It is the interaction of the staff and the committee that ultimately determined the success or failure of the clusters in Project Understanding. The project experience suggests that the cluster committee often, but not always, knows best what it needs from the staff in moving to action.

Thus, there are a wide variety of skills that are useful for a cluster staff person: organizing, consciousness-raising, training, team building, group process and administration. These are most useful when they are combined with some conceptual clarity about the issue being dealt with and a sensitivity to the needs of the people. Of course, no one staff person can perform all of these roles. So, he or she must also be a good broker of resources. The staff person must recognize his or her own weaknesses and fill in the gaps with resources inside or outside the cluster.

The wide variety of skills needed points to the importance of a staff person. When the issue is as deeply threatening as is the issue of white racism, the importance of the skilled staff person increases. Someone must continually confront the tendency of white people to "cop-out." The clergy in the Project Understanding clusters did not have the skills, the conceptual clarity or the time to perform such a role. They also did not have the advantage of being struc-turally free.

Structural freedom. The phrase "structural freedom" comes
from Jeffrey Hadden's *The Gathering Storm in the Churches.* In a chapter
entitled "The Struggle for Involvement" he examines the impact of
social structures on the involvement of the clergy in civil rights
issues.[45] He analyzes the response of a group of clergymen to a civil
rights demonstration as one example. He found that "absence of
responsibility to a specific parish membership frees one to act
according to his conscience or some other reference system."[46] Those
clergy who were structurally removed from the local parish, especially
the suburban parish, were more likely to be arrested in the demonstra-
tion. Other observations confirmed this finding. The list of clergy
who were most active in social issues was dominated by those who were
not in local parishes.[47] Their structural distance from the local
parish freed them to take stands or actions that were controversial in
most local parishes.

As was suggested earlier, local church clustering can provide
some measure of this kind of structural freedom for the cluster staff.
The cluster is one level removed from the local parish. This frees
the staff to take a leadership role in social change efforts where
local church pastors might be hesitant. However, freedom in acting on
controversial issues is not the only advantage of a cluster's structural
freedom. The Project Understanding experience suggests two other

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[45]Hadden, pp. 185-235.

[46]*Ibid.,* p. 193.

[47]*Ibid.,* p. 220.

important advantages for the cluster staff. The structural position provides the cluster staff with a useful freedom in relating to the clergy and the laity who are in leadership positions in the cluster. It also provides the staff with a unique relationship to the individual local churches.

The clergy and the laity. As was suggested earlier, building a climate of trust among the members of the cluster committees can be an important role of the cluster staff. The word "trust" does not imply a sweet sense of security, but an openness to change and a willingness to accept and manage conflict. The Project Understanding experience suggests that the structural freedom of the cluster staff is most helpful in this trust building and conflict management. The cluster staff can act as a "third party" to deal with the traditional conflicts between the clergy of the different congregations and the conflicts between the clergy and the laity.

Clergy who have been competing for members and professional status sometimes have difficulty laying this competition aside. This, coupled with the conflict that usually arises in dealing with contro-versial issues, can create mistrust among the clergy of a cluster. For example, in the Arcadia cluster of Project Understanding I, there was concern among the clergy of the smaller churches that the clergy of the larger church would dominate the cluster. There was also some pro-fessional bickering as to who was the most "liberal" clergyman. Those who had made some attempts at social change in the community were con-cerned about the credentials of those who had not.

As one of the cluster staff, the author was able to play some role in arbitrating and managing those conflicts. Being structurally free, we were seen as without bias in these conflicts. If we had been clergy from one of the cluster churches, our "third party" status would have been less clear. Of course, we also had to establish our own credibility with the clergy as well. To do this, regular meetings of the staff and the clergy were held at the beginning of the year.

Most of the Project Understanding cluster staff had regular meetings with the clergy, at least at the beginning of the program. The importance of this trust building is supported by the experience of Theodore Erickson in his attempt to organize the Richmond Hill cluster in New York City. He stated that "the ability of the clergy to develop a sense of trust and security with each other preceded the lay groups ability to plan and execute successful activity. Thus, in Richmond Hill, until clergy began meeting intensively apart from the laity, no group action was successful."[48]

Building trust between the clergy of a cluster is an important use of the structural freedom of the cluster staff. However, building trust and a viable working relationship between the clergy and the laity is just as important. In this light, intensive meetings of the clergy and the staff can also lead to problems. The mutual trust can build into an elitism that excludes the laity from decision-making in

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[48]Theodore Erickson, "Cluster Development: Comparative Experience and Process Model" (New York, Division of Evangelism, Board for Homeland Ministries, United Church of Christ, 1969), p. 17. (Mimeographed.)

the cluster. For example, the Arcadia laity became aware of this possibility and requested that the clergy meetings be discontinued. They saw the clergy beginning to use this event to usurp the power of the steering committee by pre-making its decisions in closed sessions.[49] They were able to avoid clergy dominance of the cluster in this way.

The Sun Valley-North Hollywood cluster had a much harder time, as has been previously stated. There, the clergy not only made most of the decisions for the cluster, they also tried to "protect" their congregations and the cluster from controversial issues. Dominance and over-protection are often "two sides of the same coin." They both keep lay volunteers from becoming fully involved in an effort at social change.

However, clergy dominance, and its counterpart lay passiveness, are not always the problem in clergy-lay relationships in a cluster. Some clergy and laity do recognize that clergy dominance is often counterproductive. But, those clergy who have dominated laity in the past often have difficulty working out a new style of relating. Some become passive in the face of lay leadership. They do not use their skills in a situation where they do not have control. This also reduces involvement and the resources for change in a cluster.

The Project Understanding experience suggests that the cluster staff person can use his or her structural freedom to deal with these conflicts and maximize the use of people resources in the cluster.

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[49]Jensen and Peterson, p. 12.

Since the project cluster staff were neither clergy nor laity of the local churches, they could also play a third party role here. They did this in two important ways. One was to emphasize lay leadership in decision-making. All of the project clusters stressed the importance of lay involvement and leadership. Having lay leaders in key positions in the cluster reduced the power of the clergy to dominate. It also helped to keep the cluster staff from becoming a part of an elite clergy group. Another way was to deal with these issues openly in the life of the cluster. As a third party, the cluster staff was free to bring up these issues and to insure that they were managed. In facilitating these discussions, the staff also provided a model for leadership without domination.

Clearly defining the responsibilities of the clergy in the cluster is another way that the cluster staff could have encouraged the full use of people resources. However, most Project Understanding I and II clusters did not do well at this. For example, in Arcadia the emphasis on lay leadership was often so great that the clergy began to lose interest. They participated in the cluster, but their skills and their role in their own congregation were often not fully used. It is important to realize the difference in role between the clergy and the lay volunteers in a cluster and utilize the advantages of each role.[50] This difference in roles does not necessitate the dominance of one over the other. Defining the responsibilities clearly gives

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[50]See Grace Ann Goodman, "The Northwest Ecumenical Ministry of Rochester, New York" (New York, Institute of Strategic Studies, Board of National Missions, United Presbyterian Church USA, 1969), p. 43. (Mimeographed)

each the freedom to use their talents and lessens the likelihood of domination. It also lessens the role and status conflicts between the clergy. None of the project clusters have made full use of the clergy in this way.

Developing a working relationship between individual clergy and between the clergy and the laity in a cluster is often a difficult but a necessary task. When the goal is social change, the threat of conflict over controversial issues increases the difficulty. The cluster staff can play a useful role in arbitrating conflicts and enabling a successful working relationship from a structurally free position. However, the structural freedom of the cluster staff is not only an advantage to the internal workings of the cluster. It can also be useful in the relation of the cluster staff to the local congregations.

The local churches. The staff of a cluster can have a significant impact on the local churches. The Temple City project provides one example. There the cluster staff developed a "goals project" for one of the churches. They developed a process by which most of the congregation was involved in setting goals for the future. By working with the pastor and the congregation, they enabled the development of a new style of pluralism in the church that allowed for difference of goals and commitments within the congregation. The process also encouraged the acceptance of conflict as a necessary and healthy part of church life and the development of mechanisms to manage the conflict.[51]

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[51]Forney and Smith, pp. 13-14.

There was significant change in the role of the pastor and the life of the congregation.

They were able to take on such a role because of two aspects of their position as cluster staff. One was their credibility with the pastor and the congregation because of their position in the cluster. The other was their structural freedom. This gave them enough distance from the local congregation so that they were seen as outside consultants.

Maintaining the right balance between visibility and distance is important for a cluster staff person to be effective in relating to the local churches. As was stated earlier, some of the Project Understanding staff strove so hard for visibility and credibility that they lost this critical distance and their goal to deal with racism was consumed. They became so much a part of the local churches that they could not confront them. Structural freedom is one of the advantages of clusters over single church efforts at social change. Giving it up lessens the effectiveness of the cluster.

Summary. Enabling church people to move to action on social change issues can be a difficult task. It is not easy to facilitate a conversion from a traditional church paternalism that tries to deal with poverty by changing the poor to a new consciousness that recognizes white racism in white institutions as the primary problem. Moving to effective action with that new consciousness is equally difficult. It requires a wide variety of skills from the development of goals to the implementation of the action. During this process,

the traditional conflicts between clergy and laity often get in the way. The difficulty of this process suggests the importance of a skilled full- or part-time staff person who uses the structural freedom provided by the cluster.

This can be summed up by a quotation from the Temple City report, "What gets done is what has staff and money."[52] If a church cluster is serious about enabling social change ministry to institutions and to individuals, then it must be willing to hire competent staff.

V. SUMMARY

Project Understanding provides one example of the use of clustering for social change ministries. It demonstrates that local church clustering is, in most cases, a more effective base for social change ministries than the single congregation. It also demonstrates that clusters can become effective forces for change in the church and in the community. However, it is also clear from the Project experience that clustering does not necessarily lead to change. Only two clusters out of the five that were in the project developed some continuity to the change effort. The others did significantly affect some individuals and institutions in their community, but they did not develop enough momentum to continue much beyond the one year of the program.

However, both the failures and the successes have suggested

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[52]*Ibid.*, p. 7.

some clues for the effective use of clustering for social change

ministries. A cluster is more likely to be effective if it intention-

ally chooses change as a goal at the initiation of the cluster. Dis-

guising the goal, choosing too general or too specific a goal or

choosing research or clustering as the goal are likely to block efforts

at social change. It also seems clear that some measure of autonomy

is vitally important for a cluster's change efforts. Attempts to

centralize the decision-making in the local churches point to a fear

of change. Task forces can be useful tools for this change effort,

if the timing is right. However, spreading the resources for change

too thinly or too soon will make intentional change more difficult.

It also seems clear from the project experience that skilled staff

play a crucial role in social change ministries. The skills, time and

structural freedom of competent cluster staff are vitally important

in efforts to deal with controversial social issues.

This chapter does not attempt to determine whether clustering

is the best form of the church for social change ministries. Other

forms may be more effective. However, the Project Understanding

experience demonstrates that it is one form of the church that can be

used for social change. Since it is one form of the church, it seems

appropriate that it be examined in the light of a theological under-

standing of the purpose of the church.

CHAPTER IV

CLUSTERING AS THE EMERGING CHURCH:
A THEOLOGY OF CLUSTERING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

In the introductory chapter to this dissertation, I stated my belief that the church must change and must be involved in facilitating social change in issues where people are oppressed. However, I have yet to state why I believe this is so or to provide a theological context in which to understand what kind of social change is important. I have waited until the end of my dissertation to do this for two reasons. One is my perception that it is not theological unanimity that is leading to the creation of clusters but primarily a concern for concrete social and survival issues. The other reason is that, for me, developing an ecclesiology that is both true to the tradition and translatable in modern terms is a difficult task.

However, even though the task is difficult, I also believe that it is extremely important. If clustering is to be a form of the church, then it needs to be examined in the light of what the church is called to be. Theological reflection can help clusters clarify their social goals and increase their impact on their communities and on their constituent churches. It can also help to clarify the relationship between social change and other aspects of church life. Without this theological reflection, intentional social change by clusters can too easily become a shallow effort at tinkering with society rather than

102

a response to God's action in the world.

In this chapter, I do not intend to develop a comprehensive ecclesiology of clustering. I intend only to point in some directions that I find useful for understanding the purpose of the church in the world. My thinking is markedly influenced by two theologians, Johannes Metz and Wolfhart Pannenberg. They have both put together in a new way some ideas that I had encountered before. I have drawn from their thinking to suggest why I believe social change ministries are central to the very purpose of the church and why this makes clustering vitally important.

In examining the role of the church in today's world, I shall focus on two themes: Mankind's secularized and hominized consciousness and a central theme of the message of Jesus, the "Kingdom or Reign of God." I believe that our self-understanding greatly influences how we see both the world and God's relation to it. Thus, it is important to first examine some key aspect of man's, especially western man's con-sciousness. I shall then focus on the theme "Reign of God," not because I believe the content of Jesus' message is more important than the person of Jesus, but to emphasize that the two cannot be separated. The church has often neglected or misunderstood this crucial part of Jesus' message.

After briefly elaborating on these two themes, they will be combined to develop some specific conclusions about the ministry of the church as a critical, liberating and creative leaven in society. These conclusions will then be applied to local church clustering.

Secularization and Hominization

There are two important aspects of today's world with which the church is only slowly coming to terms. One is secularization and the other can be called "hominization."[1] Both represent changes in how men and women see themselves, their world and their gods, and both are crucial for the church's self-understanding.

The growth of secularization is seen in the fact that in industrialized nations, theology and the church are no longer the center of society or of many people's individual lives. The church has been de-throned and is now only one institution among many cultural, religious, political and social institutions. There is a growing awareness of a vast and exciting pluralism in the world which can no longer be simply divided into the "Christians" and the "heathens."

A complementary process to secularization is that of "hominization." Johannes Metz uses this term to describe the increasing awareness of men and women that they can and do shape their environment. The natural world is no longer seen as a collection of divinized forces which can only be observed. Men and women now see the de-divinized world as providing the resources for the creation of their world. Although the ability to shape the world is far from complete, it is real enough so that God appears to be less and less involved in the world as the works of men and women become increasingly visible.[2]

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[1] Johannes B. Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), pp. 56-77.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

It is obvious that both of these processes of awareness involve serious dangers to the world and to the church. Rampant secularity has led to the desire to eliminate the church as an anachronism among some, and to an easy compartmentalization of "faith" among others. The process of hominization has led to new ways of treating people, primarily the poor and the colored, as resources to be exploited as well as to vast environmental destruction.

However, in spite of the dangers, both of these processes must be accepted as God-given revelations about reality. In fact, Metz and others have suggested that both processes have emerged, at least in part, through Christianity.[3] Whether or not this is the case, the church must take both processes fully into account as it considers its task in the world.

One implication of the process of secularization is that the pluralism of the world must be accepted and affirmed by the church. The social, cultural and religious pluralism that now exists will not be converted into a monolithic Christianity. The secular world will not be "won" by the Christian churches, and the church must come to accept its role as one institution among many.

Even though the church will not convert the world into members, it still plays an important role in the world as hominization suggests. It, as well as other institutions in society, does participate in shaping the future. The church need only look to its own past to see that its

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[3]*Ibid.*, pp. 64-67.

social and political decisions do shape future events. The silence of the church during Hitler's rise to power is a prime example. It has often been this type of silence on the part of the church that has condoned exploitation and oppression. However, this silence is, itself, a decision to shape the future. Thus, the church has no choice about relating to a hominized world. It cannot escape the responsibility for its past decisions or for shaping the future by claiming a divine immunity. It does participate in shaping the future. The question is: What kind of future does and must it shape? An understanding of the Biblical concept "Kingdom of God" is vitally important in suggesting an answer to this question.

The Kingdom of God

If the church is to base its purpose in the world on the ministry of Jesus, then it must critically examine what appears to be a central theme of his message, the "Kingdom of God." This is far from an easy task, however. There is no clear definition of the phrase in the New Testament. However, one can infer from the Old Testament tradition, from Jesus' message and from our understanding of the present world, what that phrase can mean to us today.

I shall focus on four aspects of the phrase that I find important for understanding the purpose of the church. The first is the concreteness with which we must see the Kingdom. The second is its inclusive character. The third and fourth aspects are the Kingdom's futurity and yet imminence, two difficult, but extremely important

characteristics of God's reign.

In contrast to those who think that the church should prepare people for an "other-worldly" heaven, the "reign of God" was primarily seen by the Hebrews as a concrete social and political reality that would be established by God in this world. Its understanding was based in the historical experience of the rule of King David.[4] David had developed the monarchy and established Israel as a major power. When that power and glory were later taken away, it was assumed that God would restore Israel, the chosen people, to its place of prominence. In modern terms, this could be comparable to saying that the "Presidency of God" would be established by a Messiah in the line of George Washington to restore the United States to its moral perfection after the events of Vietnam and Watergate. However, the inadequacies of that narrowly nationalistic image are all too apparent. A more meaningful present-day image of the Kingdom of God might be that of the ultimate utopia that is in harmony with the purposes of the universe and the will of God. It would be that time of peace, justice, love and personal fulfillment freely chosen by the people of the world. The image of the Kingdom of God must be given that kind of reality base.

Complementing the concreteness of the Kingdom is its inclusiveness. The Kingdom must be seen as going beyond all of the narrow nationalisms of the world. God is not just concerned with Israel, the United States or professing Christians. God is concerned for the whole

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[4]John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), pp. 18-19.

of reality. Thus, the reign of God must be seen as all inclusive.

Understanding the world as an historical process is helpful in clarifying this point.[5] The world is constantly changing and in a process of becoming what it will be. Many of those changes have been created by men and women, but many are also a part of the universe's coming to be. In this sense, all of reality, not just that of men and women, is in a historical process. The Kingdom of God is the fulfillment of that total historical process and not just the fulfillment of the people of Israel or of the Christians. Thus, it includes all the social, economic, cultural and political institutions as well as the rivers, mountains and planets of the universe.

The two aspects of the Kingdom that have been thus far developed suggest the third. If the Kingdom of God is to be a concrete establishment of peace and justice in all of creation, then it is obviously a future event. The Vietnam war, racial oppression, mass starvation and environmental destruction all clearly show that the ultimate utopia is not actualized in the world today. This realization is far from new, however, for the prophets of Israel came to the same understanding. The early prophets saw clearly the injustice and idolatry that led to Israel's destruction. The bitter reality of that destruction led the later prophets to reemphasize that the Reign of God was not only future, but that it was also in the eschatological future. It was apparent to them that the Kingdom of God would only be

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[5]Metz, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-55.

established at the end of time. It would take that significant a change
to bring about the future reality promised by God.

Thus, the Kingdom of God is to be seen as the promised future
toward which the historical process is ultimately moving. It is the
concrete and inclusive eschatological future of the universe. However,
the meaning of this future for the church cannot be fully understood
aside from the fourth aspect of the Kingdom, its impact on the present.
It is the ministry of Jesus that proclaims this crucial point of con-
tact between the present and the eschatological future, between the
world and the reign of God.

The future Kingdom of God was given a new dimension and a new
emphasis by the ministry of Jesus. He proclaimed that the reign of
God was "at hand." He accepted the image of God's reign as a future
eschatological event. However, he proclaimed that God's future was a
reign that could be chosen in the present. He asked his followers to
make a radical decision for love over hate, compassion over indifference,
men and women over the law and servanthood over wealth or security. He
called them to make concrete decisions about the future in the present.

To summarize, I have suggested that the Kingdom of God must
be seen as a future social and political reality. It is to be the
fulfillment of the historical process and includes all of reality. How-
ever, it is not a reality that is divorced from the present, but it is
one that must directly impact the present. Jesus called his followers,
and thus the church, to choose that future in the present. The next
step is to clarify what that means for the church in a hominized and

secularized world.

The Task of the Church

The task of the church is thus primarily to choose the reign of God in the present. It is to be the "people of God" proclaiming and choosing the future in an increasingly secularized and hominized world. The nature of that task becomes apparent in considering the application of the four aspects of the Kingdom to the present world.

Since the Kingdom of God is to be seen as a concrete reality, the church must make concrete social and political decisions in issues of peace, justice and love. In this way, the church must understand itself as a social and political institution. This is not to deny the presence or the importance of the Spirit or of levels of consciousness beyond what is normally considered as "straight" political thinking. However, the workings of the Spirit are not primarily to enable the church to escape reality, but to enable it to choose the future in the concrete present. Thus, the church must be self-consciously political.

While the church must understand its role politically, the inclusiveness of the Kingdom shows clearly that the purpose of the church is not in building its own social and political position. The purpose of the church is the future of the whole world, even though it has often been confused about this point. Wolfhart Pannenberg has suggested two ways that this confusion has manifested itself in the church: the church has either identified itself with the Kingdom or it has assumed that it is the present manifestation of the future

Kingdom.[6]

The previous discussion points out why both of these assumptions are false. The Kingdom of God includes all of reality, and the church is only one institution in a secular world. It is not now, nor will it be the utopian future of the world. Neither can it be assumed that the kingdom is or will be manifested through the church. The church participates in God's future only inasmuch as it chooses the future in the present. More often than not, it has been men and women outside the visible church who have chosen to live in accord with the future while the church has only celebrated its past. As Pannenberg suggests, it is "precisely because the church mistakes herself for the present form of the Kingdom, (that) God's rule has often had to manifest itself in the secular world outside, and frequently against the church."[7]

The eschatological nature of the Kingdom also has great implications for the church's task in the world. It might seem at first that "eschatological" implies "other-worldly," but this is not the case. To say that the Kingdom will occur at the end of time is a statement about the concretely historical process of salvation. In essence, it implies that the future Kingdom will not happen until it happens. It can neither be seen as a progressive "growth" toward the good in society or as something that is totally removed from the world. It can only be said that it will be future until it is brought about. Thus,

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[6]Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 77-78.

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 78.

neither the church nor the rest of society can assume that it has captured the ultimate utopia, for the future is always coming, bringing judgement on the present. Change is an ever-present reality, and the church must be open to the future if it is to respond to the Kingdom. This does not eliminate the importance of conserving what is of value from the past, but it does mean that there is a continual process of sorting out what is of the past and what is of the future.

Essentially, this means that everything in the present is relative to the eschatological future. All present social, political and natural structures must be seen as incomplete relative to a future embodiment of love, justice and peace. All claims that the ultimate utopia is in this institution or that political structure must be judged against the future.

The last aspect of the Kingdom is the most difficult and the most important, for it puts before the church the task of choosing the future in the present. The process of hominization points to the critical importance of this task, for it suggests that the church's choices in the present do shape that very future. The reality of secularization points to the way in which the church must be about that task. Since the world is pluralistic, the church must shape the future as a leavening agent helps the bread to rise. The church cannot impose its will nor should it. It must instead work within society as a critical, liberating and creative force for the one future of the world.

The Critical, Liberating, Creative Church

Johannes Metz suggests that the primary role of the church is

to be a critical, liberating agent in the world.[8] He suggests that the church is to continually criticize the present in light of the future and thus provide the possibility of liberating the present for that future. While affirming his conclusions about the church, it seems important to add another role for the church, that of being a creative agent in the world.

The critical task. The role of the church as a critic of society is apparent after the previous discussion of the eschatological nature of the Kingdom. The present is always relative to the future and thus there is a tension between the future Kingdom and present reality. Present social and political structures have grave inadequacies when compared to the love and justice that could be enacted. It is the task of the church to recognize and point out those inadequacies and the claims of ultimate significance that often go along with them. The courts, schools and governments often claim that, if they are not perfect, they are doing the best that can be done. This is a myth that often leads to the persecution of those who criticize what is. As Pannenberg suggests, if the church is to be faithful to the future, it must be about "demythologizing the political myths of a given time and . . . sobering up those who become drunk on their possession of power."[9] This has been the prophetic task throughout history, and it is still the task of the church.

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[8]Metz, *op. cit.,* pp. 107-124.

[9]Pannenberg, *op. cit.,* p. 85.

To perform this task, Metz suggests that the church see itself
as a "secondary institution," one "the significance of which does not
already exist before critical reflection about social practice."[10] In
other words, Metz is stating that the church must not develop insti-
tutional forms that make the decisions for other institutions in society,
but instead it must confront those institutions with their shortcomings.
The goal is to stimulate these institutions to function in accord with
the future and not to take over their job. In this way the primary
task is that of social change and not social service. The church
should actively push social service agencies to do their job and not
try to do it for them.

I essentially agree with what I understand to be Metz' concern
in suggesting that the church be a secondary institution. However, I
have some difficulty with the term "secondary" and prefer a term used
by Pannenberg to make a similar point. He suggests that the church
be seen as an "honest" institution.

For Pannenberg, an "honest" institution is "one which uncovers
the limitations of all present forms of social and political life and
which brings men into relations with the ultimate reality that com-
prises his own destiny."[11] The honest institution would not necessarily
be totally dependent on the actions of others for its own significance.
This understanding allows for the creative role of the church that will
be discussed later. It also points to the necessity of the church

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[10]Metz, *op cit.*, p. 34.

[11]Pannenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

being honest with itself as well as with society.

The church cannot be an active critical agent in society without intensive self-criticism. It has been previously discussed how the church has assumed that it is the kingdom or that the kingdom can only develop under its auspices. Both assumptions keep the church from seeing its own faults and this makes it a less effective critic of others. The church is also more tied to the past than many institutions, and this often makes it difficult for it to see or choose the future. The church must sort out from its own past those beliefs, institutional structures and styles of operation that are not a part of God's future in order to see the faults of others.

The task of liberation. It is this critique, of both the society and the church that is also the beginning point of the task of liberation. In the past, many church members have criticized the present to liberate the church from contact with the "sinful" world. However, as Metz suggests, it is not liberation from the world that is the task of the church but liberation from the present for the future. In order to choose the future, men and women must achieve some distance from the present. They must achieve a state of consciousness that allows them to see clearly the faults of the present, so that they can make concrete choices about the future. For example, it is only after a white suburbanite comes to realize that racism is a key factor in the creating of suburbia, that he will be able to make choices for justice and against racism. The critical distance from his own situation provides part of what is necessary for him to

liberate himself and his community from the oppression in which they are involved. In this way liberation from the present for the future does not lead away from involvement with the world, but into "painful conflict and self-sacrificing disagreement" with the world.[12]

If it is the critique that provides the "distance" necessary for liberation then it is "hope" that "pulls" that liberation into an active shaping of the world. It is easy to develop a critical stance toward society that leads to despair. There is so much that can be criticized, and it often is the case that efforts to choose love and justice are thwarted. But, the hope of the church is not primarily in the present realization of the reign of God but that the efforts of the present make possible the future and allow the individual and the society to participate in that future. This is not a simple optimism but it is a hope based in the eschatological promise and Christ's proclamation that the future can be participated in now. It is nowhere said that choosing the future now will be easy. In fact, the radical nature of the choice is shown in the life and death of Jesus, but the "hope" is also there in the resurrection.

The combination of this hope with a critical distance gives the church the possibility and the responsibility of participating in the liberation of the present for the future. This task must take concrete form in the liberation of men and women from racial oppression, sexism, war and poverty for the future of justice, peace and love. To do this

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[12]Metz, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

the church must not only be critical but it must also be creative in actively choosing and shaping the future.

The creative task. If the church is to liberate the present for the future, it cannot only do this as a critic. It must also act out those future possibilities in the present. The concrete embodiment of peace, justice and love are much more difficult than a critique of the inadequacies of the present. This does not discount the importance of the critique, but it suggests that one component of the critique is the creation of institutions that embody the future in a way no other institutions do. The providing of concrete options is one of the most effective ways to critique the present. Thus, the church must also create alternative futures by using its own institutions or by developing new ones. Pannenberg calls this the task of "pioneering the future of all mankind."[13]

The church must also be about this task creatively and playfully. If hope "pulls" the church into liberation, it can also liberate the church from taking itself too seriously. It is true that men and women shape the future, however, the Christian hope is not in men and women but in God's future. Joy is surely a part of the Kingdom and the church's task can be approached joyfully and playfully as well as seriously.

Even though the creative task is a necessary one, it still must be seen in the context of a secular world. The church should not try to maintain its past efforts of creating alternative futures if they

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[13]Pannenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

are no longer creative or future. The primary focus should be that of change in the whole world rather than that of building a separate world.

In summation, I have suggested that the purpose of the church in the world is to choose the future kingdom in the present secularized and hominized world. This is a concrete task of social and cultural change that is based in the love of the Gospels and a continued openness toward that future. In this sense social change is the primary function of the church. However, it is not just any change that is important. The church must choose the future Kingdom in the present world and in that way shape what the future will be.

To be about this task in society the church must become a critical, liberating and creative agent for change. It is to derive its critique from its goal, the "Kingdom of God." That critique provides the bases for the churches' participation in the liberation of all men and women from the oppression of the past for the justice and love of the future. That task must be approached creatively for the church to be effective. Seen in this light local church clustering can be vitally important for the local church if it hopes to accomplish this task.

Clustering as the Church

The experience of Project Understanding and that of other efforts at local church clustering suggest that clusters can participate in shaping the future of local communities. Clusters seem to be a more effective form for the task than most individual church struc-

tures. However, what clustering can be and what it is, are often two

different things. Many clusters avoid their primary task as a critical,

liberating and creative agent in society, just as the local churches

that form them do. Thus it is important to reexamine the roles that

I have suggested for the church and apply them specifically to cluster-

ing to show how clusters can be the church.

In a local community a cluster must take on the role of critic.

It must carefully choose and examine an issue or institution and com-

pare what it is to what it can be. This must be a radical critique,

based in the promise of love and justice. The cluster must look for

the myths developed to disguise the real issues and the persons who

have abused their power. This means intensive research in the com-

munity to achieve some clarity about the task.

The cluster has some definite advantages over individual local

churches in accomplishing this task as was shown in Chapter III. Its

cooperative base provides more access to community resources and pro-

vides the possibility for a more accurate critique. The individual

local churches have largely avoided this task in the past so the "joint

mission consciousness" of the cluster can reinforce the importance of

the critical stance. The cluster can also be a base for the self-

critique of the local churches, which helps to clarify the church's

critique of the community.

Very often clusters are formed out of a critique of the present

local church structures. Clergy and laity see the weakness of what is

and try to choose a new future. In this sense, the existence of a

cluster represents in concrete form a critique of the inadequacies of the local church. This critique can be enhanced in the cluster if it focuses on change in the local church as well as that in the community. It is as important for the cluster to research and critique its own constituency as it is for it to critique the community.

The second task of the cluster is to participate in the liberation of the present for the future. This means that the church must discern where this liberation is happening and choose to participate in it. Thus it must deal with specific community and personal issues where people are oppressed. It cannot assume that the only liberation that is occurring is that within its egis. The church must choose to participate in the struggle for liberation of the poor, people of color, the economic Third World, women, as well as that of the alcoholic, the farmer and the white-collar worker. It cannot be about this task blindly for its goal is not liberation for its own sake, but liberation for the future Kingdom.

The cluster also has some advantages over the local congregation for this task. The primary advantage is that the cluster itself can be a freeing and liberating structure. As was seen in Project Understanding, when the cluster maintains some decision-making autonomy from the local churches, it can free the participants, the staff and the local churches to choose the future. It can liberate some church members from their old patterns by providing them with some distance from their local congregations. It can liberate the cluster staff to be about the task of social change instead of being tied to models of

ministry that are not of the future. It can also be a force for liberating the local churches as was suggested by the Goals Project in Temple City, California. There the freedom of the cluster staff allowed them the role of outside consultants in helping the church to move to a new style of dealing with its internal conflicts.

Clustering can also be a place for the creativity that is a necessary part of the church's task. Since clusters are a new form, they can be a place of experimentation. Clusters can establish house churches, foster communes, develop organizations that are not now present in the local community. Structured freedom can provide clusters with the freedom to experiment without the individual local churches feeling greatly threatened by the experiment.

If clusters are not to be plodding replicas of the local churches, they must make the controversial decisions necessary to choose the future in the present. As was stated in Chapter II, extension of traditional programming, church renewal, or community need often become the only goals of clusters. However, the foregoing ecclesiology suggests that even the combination of community needs and church renewal efforts, although vitally important, is still not enough. Clusters must come to see themselves as "the emerging church," as a people responding to the future in the present and thereby shaping that future. This requires goal clarity as well as theological clarity and the development of concrete critical, liberating and creative structures.

Clustering can be a form for the emerging church. The

experience of Project Understanding demonstrates some of the possibilities, as well as illuminating the serious difficulties. However, it takes men and women who are willing to risk, to decide and to change to bring this about. This must happen for a cluster to become the emerging church in its community.

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